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HISTORIC PRESERVATION, DISCOURSES OF MODERNITY, AND LIVED EXPERIENCES IN THE OLD CITY OF DAMASCUS, SYRIA

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by

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Dedication

To my parents:

Musa Ibrahim Totah (1939-1994)

Suad Sahouria Totah (1937-2003)

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My parents Musa Ibrahim Totah and Suad Sahouria Totah have both passed away; my father long before I contemplated graduate school and my mother during my course work. Nonetheless, I always felt their presence over the years especially in Syria and when writing. To them I dedicate this dissertation.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION, DISCOURSES OF MODERNITY, AND LIVED EXPERIENCES IN THE OLD CITY OF DAMASCUS, SYRIA

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This dissertation explores the ways in which the historic preservation of the Old City of Damascus affects the social use of space. By critically examining the discourses of tradition and modernity surrounding the renovation of the courtyard houses and the gentrification of the neighborhoods, I investigate the ways in which social actors such as residents and investors are actively engaged in negotiating and redefining what it means to be "modern" in contemporary Syria. I define these social actors in terms of "locals" and "cosmopolitans" based on the various ways they have of relating to the Old City; locals as community and cosmopolitans as heritage site. I approach the changes in the Old City within the broader issues of globalization and examine how the fast pace of change brought about by global flows and exchanges transforms historic cities and old

neighborhoods in the name of modernization. Amidst these changes residents negotiate a sense of place and connectedness.

I argue the transformations in the Old City of Damascus currently taking place reflect changes that have occurred during the Ottoman and colonial period. I illustrate how history and memory take on different meanings for locals and cosmopolitans. *Ṭabaqāt* (layers) emerges from my work as the analytical framework when exploring the history, social actors, historic preservation, as well as discourses surrounding the Old City. Any understanding of the current situation in Damascus would be incomplete without historical contextualization; contemporary globalization, in turn, has to be understood within this context.

In this work I reposition the Old City within the context of its history, geography, and the social actors. I illustrate how historically the Old City has emerged as a distinct urban space, geographically and conceptually, in present day Damascus. The Old City is becoming a site of multilayered discourses— ṭabaqāt —of local experience. This includes a discussion of how modernization and preservation are interconnected processes and discourses readily apparent in this postcolonial, urban space. Furthermore, people's spatial practices and lived experiences both inform and transform their own interpretations of what it means to be "modern" and Syrian.

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Transliteration of Arabic Terms

I have used a transliteration system based on the *International Journal of Middle East Studies (*IJMES). For words in standard modern Arabic terms I followed IJMES guidelines with slight modifications when it came to vowels. I marked short vowels a, u, i, as such and kept the long vowels as in the guidelines. For example a long "و" is shown as ū. When it came to plural words I used the Arabic plural and transliterated the term as outlined above. For example the plural of *mustathmir* is *mustathmirīn*. For colloquial terms I adhered, as much as possible, to the IJMES guidelines. I also used "al" for ال the article at the beginning of some nouns and names.

I used the accepted English spelling for place and proper names. For place names, I wrote them as they would appear on Syrian maps and guidebooks. Where there was no agreed upon spelling, I would default to the IJMES guidelines.

Chapter One: Seven Heavens, Seven Rivers, Seven Layers

This dissertation explores the ways in which historic preservation of the Old City of Damascus affects the social use of space. By critically examining the discourses of tradition and modernity surrounding the renovation of the *bayt ʿarabī* (courtyard houses) and the gentrification of the *ḥārah* (neighborhood), I investigate the ways in which social actors such as residents and investors are actively engaged in negotiating and redefining what it means to be "modern" in contemporary Syria. I approach this topic within the broader issues of globalization, which I perceive as both destructive and creative to local communities and part of the discourse of modernity. The historical preservation project is leading to the detachment of the Old City from its history, geography, and the people who live and work there. I examine how the fast pace of change brought about by global flows and exchanges transforms historic cities and old neighborhoods in the name of modernization, and how residents subsequently negotiate a sense of place and connectedness.

In this work I reposition the Old City within the context of its history, geography, and the social actors through examining the historical context, discourses, and interaction of people in the Old City. I illustrate how the Old City has emerged as a unique physical locality within Damascus imbued with nostalgic memories for a glorified past and a decaying present. Furthermore, I explore the discourses that have led to its definition as such by looking at the different actors involved in this process. In addition to the

individuals who work and live there I will also examine how investors and government officials are encouraging new ways of thinking about the Old City. The lived experiences of people as they engage with the place, space, and each other are further compounded by the increased presence of tourists.

Discourses of modernity and tradition remain significant for any discussion of the change taking place in Syria. The history that is embedded in the built environment is a constant reminder of the past and the current geopolitical situation in the region makes this past important in the construction and redefinition of what it means to be modern. Modernity is a process of unintended consequences (Giddens 1990) found in the lived experiences and practices of people. It is here that the continuity is found and not in the historic buildings with new facades. The Old City remains significant for local residents in how they maintain their own sense of belonging and being in the alleys and courtyard houses, as they increasingly come into contact with outsiders.

The Old City is many things. It is an actual physical location permeated with meaning and significance that can set a flood of nostalgic memories in some Syrians for a premodern lifestyle. Over the past ten years it has also become a "negotiable good" through the marketing of this nostalgia for life in courtyard houses by transforming them into restaurants, cafes, and hotels. Television programs focus on the Old City as a site of identity formation for the inhabitants of Damascus (Salamandra 2004:3-4). However, the Old City is also a thriving vibrant neighborhood of present day Damascus with homes, stores, and places of worship where inhabitants and business owners have meaningful lives conducted in the present.

The lived experiences of the inhabitants of the Old City are coming under scrutiny as the built environment is being altered in the name of preservation. Though change has always been part of the cityscape, what is currently taking place these days is decidedly different in scope and scale. Any discussion of the history and heritage of the Old City focuses on the built environment with scant mention of how these projects and programs actually impact the inhabitants. This dissertation is about this impact; the different ways that different groups of individuals define what it means to be modern. The increase in traffic of non-residents to the neighborhoods of the Old City is creating new forums for exchange and contact between what I call "locals" and "cosmopolitans," delineating various ways of relating to the Old City.

I find the terms "cosmopolitans" and "locals" as suggested by (Hannerz 1996) useful in explaining the social layering in the Old City and their relation to the Old City. "Cosmopolitanism" for Hannerz is "a perspective, a state of mind, or – to take a more process-oriented view – a mode of managing meaning" (Hannerz 1996:102). Using this orientation, I explore how Syrian cosmopolitans are finding new meanings in and new ways of relating to the Old City after decades of neglect.

Cosmopolitans are those who possess a willingness or ability to engage with diverse cultural experience. They have an intellectual and aesthetic acceptance and since it implies layers of engagement with diverse cultures they are at home in the world (Hannerz 1996:103). Syrian cosmopolitans disengage themselves from the local culture and locals of the Old City because they consider them to be "unmodern." Instead they find western or global culture more attractive. I will use the term "unmodern" instead of

tradition when talking about certain practices or beliefs that the current modernity project aims to contain or eradicate. Cosmopolitans are now beginning to see the possibilities and potential in the Old City for investment. Many have traveled to Europe and visited historic city centers where houses have been converted into restaurants or boutique shops. Instead of housing dozens of families at cheap rent, cosmopolitans envision a courtyard house as an upscale restaurant or hotel catering for tourists. In this process of investment, cosmopolitans are also preserving heritage.

Locals in this dissertation are engaged with the global but at a different scale. They maintain their distance from cultural experience that diverges from their own. They are aware and exposed to other cultures and global communities but they remain for the most part connected to their own way of life. Locals have a more inward directed sense of aesthetics. They are transnational in the sense that they have traveled, have satellite TV that beams the world into their living rooms, and have relatives abroad who visit and send remittances. They rent rooms in their houses to foreigners and see tourists in their neighborhoods. Yet this exposure to other cultures does not lead them to disengage with their own. Their transnationalism does not translate into transforming their built environment into heritage sites. They want to have comfortable homes and clean neighborhoods. They also have their own interpretation of what it means to be modern as will become apparent throughout this dissertation.

Both cosmopolitans and locals are categories that transcend class, origin, ethnicity, and religious affiliation. For example a cosmopolitan is not confined to being Damascene and rich but can be a rural migrant and poor. The same applies to locals. As

categories these labels deal primarily with attitudes and perceptions regarding the Old City. The main difference between cosmopolitans and locals lies in whether investment in the Old City should be geared towards tourist establishment, and hence the global community, or more immediate local concerns such as comfortable homes for residents.

The Old City is emerging as a "forum for transition" (Kapchan 1996:3) where new social and spatial practices are forming alongside earlier incarnations. I take as my starting point for understanding this process the many *ṭabaqāt* (layers) of modernity in the current Syrian situation. There are different discourses of what it means to be-and how to be-modern as said and observed by the different social actors at various levels. There is the official discourse that is interpreted, modified, and at times contested by residents, shopkeepers, and investors in the Old City. The government attempts to create new notions of individuals and citizens (Ali 2002) but residents have their own interpretation of what it means to be modern. The Old City is a unique site for the negotiation of modernity, because it is emerging through the historical preservation project as the ultimate site of the Syrian Modern.

Many Syrians, including government bureaucrats and in official discourse, consider the Old City as decaying, unhealthy, and deprived of modern services. In the 1970s they called for its demolition, except for the monuments and religious sites, and the construction of modern neighborhoods in its place. This was the discourse of some people who viewed the past as obsolete and useless in the modern world. Some residents of the historic city have been involved in efforts to protect their neighborhoods from

demolition as was proposed by government urban planners. However, these same long-term inhabitants are seen as contributing to the decline of the historic center by their mere presence. As the Old City became entrenched in people's minds as a site of history and heritage, the current residents constantly negotiated their claim on the city. This issue becomes more pertinent as some consider the current inhabitants as not being authentic "Damascenes" of the Old City, and therefore have no say in its future. My research aims to highlight these different discourses and illustrate how they are creating new practices in the Old City.

Ṭabaqāt

My research is conducted in an urban setting that should be approached as a process in order to understand the transformations taking place in social relations and practices. Low tackles the study of the city and has proposed a way to do this through "imagining" the city. She provides a list of twelve images that can facilitate the writing and reading of such a complex topic. She groups these images under the following headings: Social relations, economic process, urban planning and architecture, religious and cultural aspects (Low 1999:5). Although she stresses that these images are "meant to be heuristic and illuminating, neither all-encompassing nor mutually exclusive" (Ibid), they are difficult to work with since a city cannot be confined to any one category, and rather it is several images all at once. Low is aware of this, yet does not provide for overcoming the fact that once a city is classified under one heading cross-referencing becomes complicated.

Other approaches to studying the city continue to draw on images and metaphors. Soja proposes his own metaphors or what he calls "discourses on the postmetropolis:" Postfordist, cosmopolis, exopolis, fractal city, carceral archipelago, and simcities (Soja 2000). Though he is more creative in naming his images than Low, they are similar to her categories, she only breaks hers further than Soja does. These images provide new ways of thinking of the city in the postmodern moment, but though Low cautions they are not exclusive categories, and Soja insists they are guides, "generalized particularities," they can hinder a creative imagination of the city. In a sense the imagination has been done for you and this is where the challenge lies, working with categories such as these that have potent images, especially as proposed by Soja. No one city can be imagined in any one way, but in many different layers.

Nonetheless, both Low and Soja are concerned with what they view as the new urban process, and how to best study this process as globalization is intensifying the process of change in cities beyond recognition. I find a return to Lefebvre's "conceptual triad:" spatial practices, representations of space, and spaces of representation (1991:33) an important tool in the study of cities. Unlike Soja and Low, these categories leave the imagination of how space is perceived, conceived, and lived up to the researcher. I propose that the urban setting should define the theoretical framework for its analysis. In my work on the Old City one recurrent theme that constantly emerged was ṭabaqāt where the different historical, social, discursive layers come to the forefront to create a palimpsest of what is currently taking place in and is Damascus.

Damascus is a city of palimpsests through which one sees seven historical layers. I often heard this metaphor cited when Syrians talked about the history of the city. This was usually in the context of "If you dig anywhere in the city you will find seven layers: Aramaeans, Roman, Byzantine, Umayyad, Mamelukes, Ottoman, French" or some other variation of the many empires and civilizations that have left their mark on the city.

In the historical preservation of houses ṭabaqāt of paint and plaster are removed to reveal a palimpsest of ornaments and decorations of the previous eras. There are layers of discourse, of "modernity", of "tradition", and of the "premodern" that can be applied to any study of the city. People who live in the Old City are different classes, also referred to as ṭabaqāt, not only in terms of socioeconomic status, but also through the various layers of identification as Damascene, rural, urban, Syrian, and others.

Many who live in the Old City in a bayt ʻarabī (courtyard house) dream of a *ṭābiq*[1] (flat) since apartments are separate stories, layers, stacked one upon another. The bayt ʻarabī is typically one unit only two stories high in most cases. Moving into a ṭābiq is a vertical move, both, figuratively and literally. For some who live in the Old City, social mobility is a spatial movement from the two story courtyard to a flat in a multistory apartment building outside the Old City. The contrast between ṭābiq and courtyard house is made all the more striking since the move signifies becoming modern.

Seven is also a number of layered significance. It is a holy number in Islam depicted in the different locales of Damascus. There are seven layers in heaven and they

[1] *Ṭābiq* comes from the same root as *ṭabaqāt*, *ṭabaqa* (layer)

can be seen in the Barada Panels, the mosaics on the façade of the Umayyad Mosque. The Arab traveler Ibn Jubeir called Damascus "The paradise of the east…If heaven is on earth than it is Damascus without a doubt. If it is in the skies than surely she is its equal" (Jubeir 1980:235).[2] There are seven gates to heaven and in the beginning seven gates to Damascus. There are seven tributaries to the river Barada that bring water to all of Damascus and feed the fountains found in the courtyards of the houses in the Old City. In keeping with the number seven there are seven layers or chapters to my dissertation including the introduction and conclusion. The chapters themselves will be an interpretation of the different layers to understanding the current situation of the Old City of Damascus.

Historical Context

There is a rapid alteration of neighborhoods and quarters[3] that is changing the cityscape and creating an urban palimpsest that reflects "urban spaces as lived spaces that shape the collective imaginaries" (Huyssen 2003:7).[4] In the past ten years the historic intramural city has witnessed new, intensified transformations as the vernacular buildings that were saved from demolition in the late 1970s were now being refurbished as restaurants, hotels, art galleries, and other tourist establishments. Some call this process preservation of the distinct architecture of the historic center. It can also be seen as gentrification (Smith 1996) though the two processes are not diametrically opposed, and

[2] All translations are by the author.
[3] I use quarter and neighborhood to delineate the regions of the historic center though they can also be used for other districts. Each quarter is composed of several neighborhoods.
[4] I would like to acknowledge Shareah Talghani who first used this term to describe my project.

privilege the upper classes that can fund these projects over the usually less resourceful local residents (Fitch 2001:23). Many of these long-term inhabitants did not perceive their neighborhoods as something to be preserved, but to be modernized according to their interpretation of modernization. Since historic preservation is part of the modernity project, one can see alternate discourses of modernity playing out on the cityscape of the Old City of Damascus.

The walled section of Damascus became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979 after a campaign to save it from demolition.[5] This historic city is valued for its physical layout and several important monuments, including religious sites for Christians and Muslims, especially the Umayyad Mosque considered the fourth holiest site in Islam. There are many mausoleums of famous Muslim men and women, in addition to public buildings of different historical eras constructed in the distinct local architectural style.

However, it is only in the past ten years that government and private efforts have translated this into an actual preservation program that reaches beyond prominent monuments and religious sites. Since these programs are officially supported and sponsored by the state, they are, in many instances, imposed upon the residents of the Old City. What makes the case of Damascus unique in many respects is the current geopolitical climate that has engulfed the region since 9/11 cumulating with the war in Iraq and most recently the assassination of the Lebanese Prime Minister, Rafeeq Al-

[5] The intramural city of Damascus is listed on the UNESCO World Heritage List as the "ancient city of Damascus." The UNESCO World Heritage List is an inventory of cultural and natural heritage around the world that are considered universal in their importance and significance. As heritage they are a trust that reflects the achievements of the past to be passed on to the future. For more information see http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/.

Hariri in February 2005.[6] Although these events added to the isolation of a politically defiant Syria, both regionally and internationally, the current transformations of the Old City underline Syria's engagement with the global community and global discourses.

In 1984, a committee was formed by the Syrian government to protect the intramural city from modernization and to formulate and implement policy to guide the restoration of the historic quarters and vernacular buildings of the intramural city. These were the cumulative efforts of local and international experts over the course of several decades, beginning in the 1940s, to combat urban renewal in the historic city. According to many Syrians, the process of modernization was destroying the distinctive urban fabric of the Old City by widening roads for vehicular traffic and demolishing two-story courtyards houses to construct concrete multilevel apartment buildings. The emphasis of preservation efforts has been on the intramural section of Damascus, even though there are areas outside the walls that have as much claim to monuments and historic buildings as the Old City. Moreover, the concern in the historic preservation projects is for the physical environment without any provision for the people and lifestyle that exist in the neighborhoods and quarters.[7]

[6] Syrians worry about the war in Iraq and the ramifications it might have on their country. After the assassination of the Lebanese Prime Minister, Syria was forced by the international community to withdraw its troops in Lebanon in April 2005 after a thirty year presence.

[7] The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) issued "The Declaration of San Antonio 1996" where it stated that the social aspects and the communities living in cultural sites are integral to the protection of the site. This approach to the preservation of heritage sites is not present in the Syrian context.

Theoretical Background

I locate my work in the anthropology of space and place (Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2003) as expressed in the broader thematic issues of modernity and tradition (Berman 1983; Giddens 1990; Harvey 1990; Mitchell 2000); postcolonalism urbanism (Fuller 1992; King 1990; Rabinow 1989; Wright 1991) with a focus on issues of gentrification and urban renewal (Smith 1996; Zukin 1995); heritage and the preservation of heritage sites (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Lowenthal 1985). The built environment is socially produced and constructed increasingly within the global process (Hayden 1993; Low 1999). Thus, my questions are unified by their connection to broader scholarly discussions of globalization.

Modernity in the Middle East has been described as continuity with the past (Armbrust 1996) but scant ethnographic work exists exploring this continuity. Most of the work on modernity in the Middle East has focused on Egypt. In most cases, this continuity has been attributed to the incomplete project of modernity in the Middle East. Modernity is viewed in conjunction with modernization, a course of action that is at once a shift in European intellectual thought accompanied by increased industrialization and urbanization, class awareness and differentiation, and the creation of the nation-state. In Syria important work has been done by Shannon where he explores the "conceptualizations of modernity" in the realm of Arab music (Shannon 2001, 2003a, b). Discourses on authenticity and tradition in Arabic music are framed within the larger context of an authentic national Syrian and Arab identity that defines what it means to be

modern in the contemporary world. In my work I look at how the social practices in the Old City lead to similar conceptualizations.

Harvey (1990) views modernity as a project of the Enlightenment, a stage in the development of capitalism in the West, and he discusses it in isolation of the non-West. Mitchell (2000) and Rabinow (1989) approach modernity in the West as a result of its interaction with the non-West. Mitchell (2000) rejects the notion that modernity is a Western project and stresses the universality of the project of modernity, the process rather than the model. Although I am cognizant of pitfalls of approaching modernity as a universal project, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to engage with the discourse of alternative or non-Western modernity in Syria.[8]

I agree with Mitchell (2000) that modernity is a process that replicates itself in different parts of the world and that the project of modernity as begun in the west had a universalizing mandate. What is taking place in Syria in general and in the Old City in particular is not "alternative modernity" (Gaonkar 1999), instead it is a tactical practice (De Certeau 1988). I approach modernity as a lived experience rather than a theory (Appadurai 1996:2). I diverge from Appadurai in that I do not focus on modernity as "rupture" (3) but rather how it can be a continuum (Hannerz 1996:44). Although, I will indicate where instances of rupture have occurred in the Syrian modernity project, I will emphasis the continuity that is made possible by spatial practices, since it is where individuals negotiate their sense of belonging and connection to place.

[8] For other views of modernity see Mitchell (2000), Gaonkar (1999). As for a discussion of modernity in Syria and the search for an alternative modernity among Syrians see Shannon (2001).

Harvey discusses how the modernity project was largely an urban project (Harvey 1990:25) thereby indicating that to create modern subjects entails altering their spatial practices. Although the act of preserving heritage can be seen in other sites than the city, it is only in the urban setting where the process is elaborated in people's tactical practices where they impose their own interpretation on the cityscape (De Certeau 1988). Heritage in the city becomes the embodiment of life there, in such a way it cannot be seen in art or music for example. In the city different people from various backgrounds and classes interact and offer competing definition of what it means to be modern. The city provides a larger forum for the negotiation of the competing discourses of modernity and tradition than art or music can. The city is an open forum for the engagement among the different social groups and discourses; art or music tends to engage a narrower segment of the population.

The heritage of the city lies not only in the architecture but also in the practices associated with living in a historic built environment. These practices can be seen as unmodern that need to be eliminated or tradition and should be maintained. History, discourse, lifestyle, and preservation are the different ways the urban landscape is being reconfigured in the name of modernity. I argue that modernity in the Syrian context is a strategy of survival, a tactical practice. As a tactical practice it is exhibited in different layers and aspects. My research reveals that local residents have their own interpretation of what it means to be modern that at times diverges from that of the official interpretation as it plays out on the cityscape.

The purpose of this dissertation is to illustrate the different ṭabaqāt of tactical modernity in the Syrian context of the Old City. The Old City is being rewritten as a testament to modernity in the name of preserving the "traditional." Tradition as such is "a version of the past which is intended to connect with and ratify the present. What it offers in practice is a sense of *predisposed continuity*." (Williams 1977:116 emphasis in original). I demonstrate the ways in which tactical modernity is employed by the different social actors to negotiate their own course of modernization, and in turn are creating competing traditions. In his discussion of how the Alamo became a symbol of modernity in Texas, Flores uses the term Texas Modern (Flores 2002). I use the term Ottoman and Syrian Modern in describing the processes of modernity in the Old City. The Syrian government is engaged in its own interpretation of the Old City as a heritage site but different meanings on what this means exist among private investors. Furthermore, my analysis shows how the long-term residents have their own modernization practices for their own version of modernity.

The modernization that led to the creation of the traditional Old City is currently seen as the process that most threatens the unique vernacular physical layout. The daily practices of the people who continued to live there as they pursue their own process of modernization is leading to changes in the cityscape. These changes are officially viewed as detrimental to the future of the Old City as a heritage site. I will explore these different layers of modernization in following chapters.

Historic Cities

History, memory, and the past are contested spaces continuously negotiated by individuals to meet the demands of their present (Handler 1988; Trouillot 1995), yet they are rarely studied *of* cities where the history, social relations, symbols, and political economies are all directly linked with social behavior. History and memory have become disconnected that they cannot be spoken of within the same experience-the onslaught of modernity has rendered memory insignificant; memory is practice in the daily life of people whereas history is a representation and reconstruction of this very practice (Nora 1989). However "cultural memories…are spatially and physically embedded in geographically fixed sites of public history and culture" (Flores 2002:18). This holds especially true for historic cities, where the cityscape encompasses distinct districts of archeological ruins and/or neighborhoods of premodern architecture and layout alongside modern forms of construction.

Historic cities present unique challenges, since the past is present in both the physical layout and built environment, as well as in the imagination of inhabitants and others. The historic city, being possessed by the past forefronts the "underlying tensions between current and previous inhabitants; between local history and world history; between user and visitor; between internal and external space; between depth and superficiality" (Orbasli 2000:8). Herzfeld explores this tension between government efforts for the historical preservation of a Cretan town and the resistance by residents of official policy through his discussion of monumental and social time (Herzfeld 1991). Gable and Handler explore issues concerning authenticity and accurate representations of

the past in their study on Williamsburg, VA (Gable and Handler 1996; Handler and Gable 1997) where the past is recreated for the present. In my work I will touch on these issues of how memory of the Old City is not only threatened by the historic preservation projects that is creating a new authenticity for the present but by the people who live there and who are not considered the "real" stewards of this memory.

Cities in the Middle East

The Middle East as a region is replete with historic cities that remain habitable yet there is scant research on the people who reside in areas that are increasingly being designated as heritage sites. The study of historic cities in turn is important for contributions to urban anthropology. The city has not had significant impact in anthropology where most research focuses on the broader themes of anthropological inquiry of space, time, and identity (Low 1996a). Historic cities have unique qualities and circumstances than cities without a historic center, but seem to be absent from most of the scholarship in urban anthropology. Furthermore, much of the research conducted in urban anthropology has focused on western cities, with few examples taken from the Middle East.

Researchers on cities in the Middle East have concentrated on the traits of cities in the region and how these characteristics distinguish them from other urban settings in the world since they are predominately inhabited by Muslims (Abu Lughod 1987; Alsayyad 1992; Brown 1986; Eickelman 1974; Van Leeuwen 1995). Until recently most of the research on cities in the Middle East ignored the complex issues of social history, urban

growth, and globalization focusing mainly on what constitutes and distinguishes an "Islamic" city from other urban settings (Abu Lughod 1987; Shami 1996). The term "Islamic" city originated with Max Weber's seminal work on cities where he decided that such an entity did not exit outside Europe. Though cities in the Middle East were existence long before many of their western counterparts, they were considered as lacking the autonomy and formal commerce organization of European cities (Eickelman 1974:275).

Attempts to move beyond the "Islamic" city paradigm have fallen into other traps such as the "colonial" city and "city in crises" where the focus is on the disaster in these cities brought about by overpopulations, poverty, oppression, lack of civil society, and economic opportunities (Bonine 1997; Shami 1996). My research is significant for the new emerging literature on Middle Eastern cities that look at the urban process within the local context (Eldem, et al. 1999; Ghannam 2002; Weber 2002). I seek to illustrate that cities in the Middle East are complex, heterogeneous, and vibrant places where inhabitants are able to negotiate a sense of place (Feld and Basso 1996)despite urban change.

One of the most significant works to appear on Middle Eastern cities is the work of Ghannam (2002) that deals with modern discourse and the impact of modernization projects on local people. Her case study is Cairo where a poor population is relocated from a traditional neighborhood in the middle of Cairo to a distant suburb and is housed in government issued modern apartments. The state is the modernization agent and people are viewed as obstacles to change. Ghannam focuses on how this relocated

population adapted and adjusted to the new spaces through spatial practices. The relocated population was able to articulate an identity that was based on what they perceived to be modern in an increasingly global city. Hence, her study is also engages the global and how the local experiences transnational forces that are restructuring Cairo.

Although Ghannam's work falls within the trope of modernity and modernization especially in Egypt, her work is important because it is among the first to deal with urban space in the Middle East. Urban anthropology is significantly absent from work in the Middle East. Although there are many studies conducted *in* cities they are not *of* cities. As the Middle East becomes predominately urban, this is a significant gap in the scholarship of the region. I build on Ghannam's work and show how the historic urban setting itself can be the space for different discourses and practices on what it means to be modern in contemporary Syria.

Scholarly studies on the preservation efforts of historic cities in the Arab Middle East have been limited in general. Moreover, not many deal with the populations that continue to reside there and most focus on policy or procedure (Celik 1986; Jeffery 1997; Micaud 1978). In my project I address this scarcity by focusing not on the history of the Old City of Damascus and how preservation is taking place there, but the role of the different actors in this process. Historic preservation cannot be understood fully without the social aspects. It is more than just procedure and technique, it involves individuals making decisions based on their interpretation of heritage preservation, colonial and national modernist practices, and uses of history in new forms of defining what it means to be modern. My research is a continuum of work in Middle Eastern anthropology on

modernization and modernity but in the new context of urban spatial practices as well as historic preservation.

I contribute to the theorization of the city in anthropology in general, and cities in the Middle East in particular, by looking at how practices in the city enhance our knowledge about connections between the local and global, information that is important in understanding the current rapid transformations that societies are undergoing. By doing this I also advance the study of urban anthropology in the Middle East beyond cities in crises and what defines an "Islamic" city. Furthermore, it expands the areas of theorization in the anthropology of the Middle East (Abu Lughod 1989).

Field Sites in the *Ḥārah*

Damascus is the perfect site for my project because it has a history that spans over 5000 years of continuous human settlement, and the intramural city *al-balad al-qadīmah*[9] (Old City) is its oldest neighborhood. Although there are other neighborhoods and areas that are historic, it is the intramural city that is the center of government policy and private projects. It remains to this day a thriving residential and commercial area, and since the early 20th century the walled city has been called the "Old City" to distinguish it from other neighborhoods. Present day Damascus is a mixture of contemporary and historic neighborhoods intertwined. The former are notable for their wide straight streets that meet at right angles and rows of apartment buildings; the latter are characterized by winding narrow alleys that end in cul-de-sacs and courtyard houses.

[9] Sometimes it is also called *dimashq al-qadīmah* which means Old Damascus. Since there are other neighborhoods in Damascus that are historic I will use Old City throughout the dissertation.

In addition to the physical layout of a historic district, the Old City is surrounded by a wall that was built by the ancient Romans that still exists largely intact around the city. It is also the location of many of the famous monuments and religious sites in Damascus. The wall physically separates the Old City from other historic neighborhoods in today's Damascus. The history and the presence of these monuments elevate the Old City above the other neighborhoods as a distinct and unique space. (Figure 1)

Damascus is in the southwest of present day Syria, at the foot of Mount Qasyun which forms its northern border. Mount Qasyun lies at the end of the Ante Lebanon mountains which form a barrier between the interior and the Mediterranean coast. They block seasonal rain and causing the aridity of the climate of Damascus (Degeorge 2005:7). Surrounded by mountains on three sides, Damascus is open to the eastern desert that continues until the Euphrates River (Kheir 1996:124). To the south lies the Ḥaurān region, the southern part of Syria famous for its fertile plains where wheat and other cereal crops were grown and sold in the city since antiquity. The strategic location of Damascus between east and west has led to the development of a trading center over the course of the centuries (Kurd Ali:10).

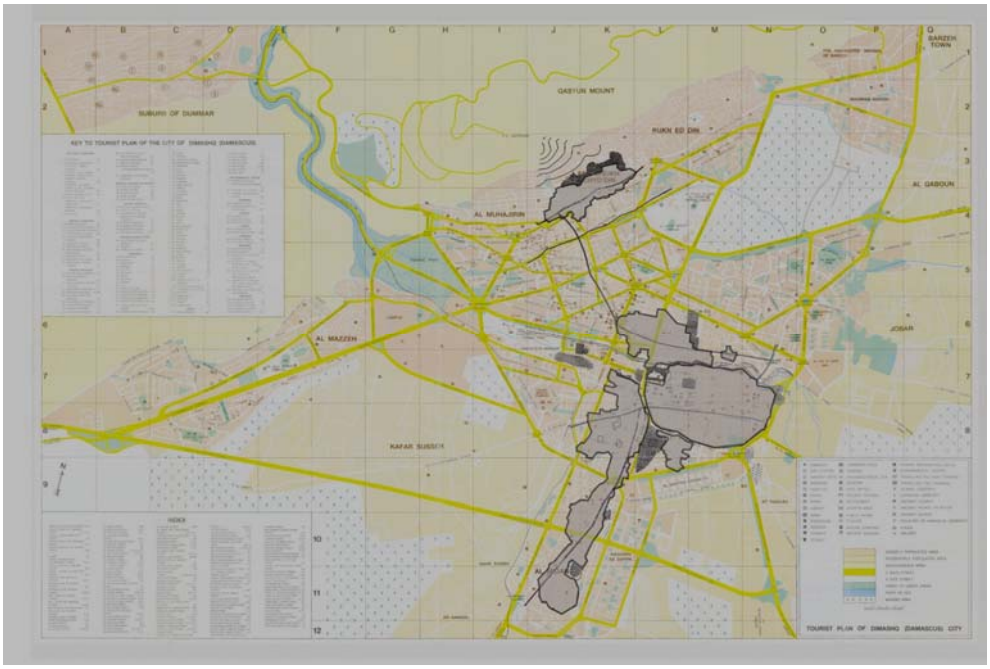

Figure 1: Map of Damascus
Figure 1 depicts present day Damascus. The areas shaded in gray are the historic quarters. The Old City is the oval shaped shaded area.

In my fieldwork I focused on the various quarters and neighborhoods in the Old City undergoing transformation mainly through the opening of tourist establishments. In order to understand the daily lived experiences of people I took my research to the ṭabaqah or layer of Haret Hanania (Hanania neighborhood) in the quarter of Bab Touma in the Old City, where I lived during the course of my fieldwork in 2003-2004 (Figure 2).[10]

[10] Ḥārah is used when talking about neighborhood or the neighborhood. When the name of the neighborhood is included I will use haret as in Haret Hanania.

Haret Hanania lies between Bab Touma and Bab Sharqi in the northeastern section of the Old City and consists of one main street, in the shape of a "7."[11] Several alleys diverge from the street, and all end with a cul-de-sac. Therefore the streets are the only way in and out of the neighborhood. The street is wide enough for one car or van. This street is one of the few in the Old City where people who live and work there sit outside their stores or homes especially on warm winter days. People are always present in the street throughout the day. The city wall forms the eastern boundary of Haret Hanania and some houses in the neighborhood actually sit on the wall.

I chose this neighborhood because it contained a good mix of tourist establishments with residential areas. Tourists walk to the church amidst children playing in the alleys. Although several homes have been converted into shops and restaurants, it still retained the atmosphere of a residential neighborhood as will be described in Chapter Three. Many long-term residents continued to live in houses that their family had been living in for generations. Some have moved out during my stay, but then others moved in. It is predominately a Christian neighborhood and some of the practices concerning women may not apply to other neighborhoods, as I will note in my discussion.

As mentioned above, I view the idea of locals and cosmopolitans as being important for designating people's aesthetic relationships to heritage, home, and

[11] In order to simplify matters and avoid confusion I will use street to describe a route that can be traversed by a car or van. Alley is the route that is too narrow for cars but used mainly by pedestrians. An alley usually ends in a cul-de-sac but not always. The Old City is a combination of streets and alleys.

neighborhood. It is not meant to mask other variations such as class, ethnicity, and religion, especially when it comes to describing the inhabitants of the Old City.

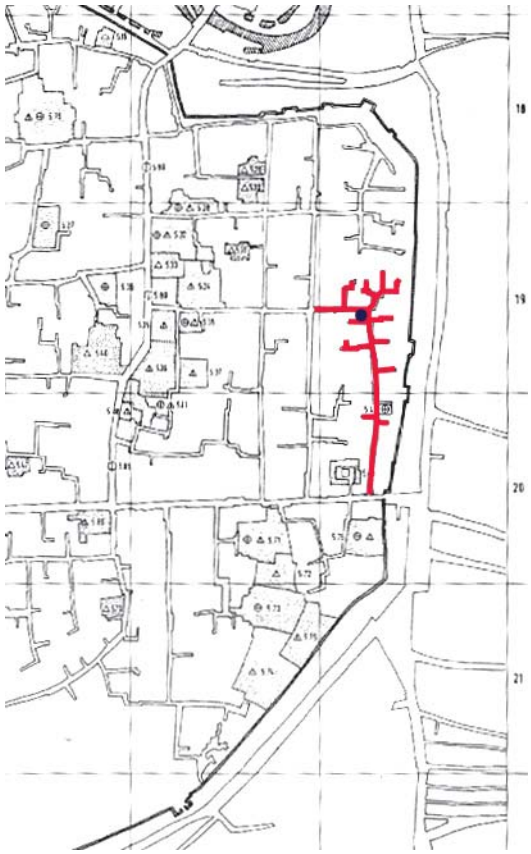

Figure 2: Map of Haret Hanania
The red line indicates Haret Hanania which lies in the western part of the Old City. The black line is the wall. Map is adapted from (Sacks 1998).

Defining shwām (Damascenes) is a contentious issue. Technically, a *shāmī* (a Damascene) means anyone who can claim several generations living in the city. In some cases people would tell me they are shwām only to have this identity negated by other informants who tell me they are not. Thus to be a shāmī one must not only claim the group identity but also be seen as such by others. The identity of a shāmī transcends

religious, ethnic, class, and occupation lines. As Salamandra has noted the "relationship of group identity to class structure is central in the Syrian context, where sectarian and regional affiliations are often alloyed with those of hierarchy" and continue to be reworked in the current context (2004:34). However, defining class in Syria remains contentious at best. It is commingle of origin, occupation, and income.

Over the course of the past 200 years, many of the inhabitants of the Old City who were considered to be shwām have moved to the extramural neighborhoods and to the newer neighborhoods. However, it is those who have left in the mid-20th century to new neighborhoods, for reasons I will detail in Chapter Two, who are considered the original inhabitants. The houses they left behind, the bayt ʻarabī, soon became populated by rural migrants and Palestinian refugees in search of cheap housing, many of whom still live there to this day. Although many of the current inhabitants of the Old City have been living there for over 30 years, they are not considered as shwām by officials and therefore not the true stewards of the city and its history.

The labels shwām and non-Damascene are limited in understanding the current role of inhabitants in the transformation of the Old City and therefore I use cosmopolitans and locals. These labels indicate a relationship with the city, not only based on background and socio-economic status but rather on whether one perceives the Old City as a heritage site or just home. They also assume a level of awareness or lack there of to the aesthetics of the Old City

This dissertation is not about the sectarian and ethnic make-up of the Old City, a topic that I will explore in subsequent research projects. I am aware of the complex

ethnic and religious composition of Syria in general and the Old City in particular. My topic on the historic preservation of the Old City covers all the neighborhoods regardless of ethnic or religious affiliation of the people who live there. The same policies and procedures apply to all. Furthermore, the preservationists also include individuals of various ethnicities and religious affiliations. The concentration of certain establishments in the Christian quarter gives the impression that the inhabitants of this part of the city were more tolerant of tourists and restaurants in their midst. Restaurants in Christian neighborhoods can serve alcohol.

However, on closer examination this is a problematic generalization. Some attempts to open restaurants in the Christian quarter were blocked by neighbors who did not want to live near restaurants. Furthermore, there were several restaurants in predominately Muslim neighborhoods, two of which serve alcohol. The fact of the matter remains restaurants, hotels, and art galleries are opening all over the Old City. The trend may have started in the Christian quarter since it was perceived easier to infiltrate but then some of the initial investors had local ties to the neighborhood.

For the most part the Old City remains inhabited by Syrians in their different sectarian groupings including a dwindling number of Syrian Jews. There is a significant Palestinian minority that moved to Damascus after 1948 and a growing contingent of Iranians and Iraqis. Currently there is an influx of Iranians into the Old City and their impact can be seen in the neighborhoods surrounding Shiite shrines or those that historically housed a local Shiite population. Their impact on the cityscape remains to be seen. Thus any discussion of displaced populations of different nationalities such as in

Istanbul (Bartu 1999, 2001; Mills 2004; Oncu 1999) remains irrelevant. I was unable in my research to find a single group that was being singled out by the recent transformations of the Old City. However, with the new changes in the rent laws the poorer inhabitants may be forced to leave the Old City. I will discuss this in Chapter Seven.

Furthermore, I depart from other studies on Syria and do not give the religious or ethnic affiliation of my informants. In my course of stay and study in Syria, I found that religion and ethnicity are important in how people identify themselves, and many did stress their sectarian identities. However, when it came to discussing the Old City people presented themselves as first and foremost Syrian and Arab and this identity took precedent over all other identities. I believe this emphasis on a national identity among my informants is in part related to my research topic since a study on the historic preservation of the Old City is less likely to highlight sectarian differences. Pride in heritage and the Old City is a national project that unifies people across religious and ethnic lines. People did identify as shwām or not and it was this dichotomy that at times was stressed regardless of religion. It will be noted where it is significant.

Methodology

This dissertation is the result of 22 months of fieldwork conducted intermittingly between 2001 and 2004. My first trip lasted nine months from September 2001 until June 2002; it offered me an introduction to Syria in general and Damascus in particular. This orientation was essential for developing my dissertation project. My second stay in

the field lasted from November 2003 until December 2004 when I actually lived in the intramural Old City in Haret Hanania. Here I had access to the heavily tourist areas while living in a historic neighborhood. My research sites also included several of the houses being renovated into restaurants and hotels or as dwellings concentrated largely in the Bab Touma, Qaimariyah, and Shaghour neighborhoods.

Most research on the production and construction of space either focused on behavioral practices or architectural descriptions but ignore the social relations and practices (Low 2000). Low overcomes these methodological limitations in her work by combining ethnographic fieldwork with ethnohistorical research. I find her integration of different approaches both important and practical to understanding social behavior in public settings. Low's approach demonstrates how Lefebvre's three-part model to the study of the production of space: representations of space, spatial practices, and representational spaces can be used as tools of analysis instead of categories of research (Liggett 1995:247).

According to Rodman the layered meanings of place are constructed spatially and in order to get at the many lived experiences of places she suggests "multilocality" and "multivocality" (Rodman 2003). By emphasizing the "multiple sites" of my research, (Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Marcus 1998), I critically question issues of connections, flows, and border crossing that seem to privilege the global over the local (Tsing 2000). In order to avoid the homogenization of my research topic and site, I approach the study of Damascus without the assumptions that come with the pre-determined binaries of present-past and global-local (Hannerz 1996:19), I illustrate how the changes in the Old

City are a complex process of several ṭabaqāt that cannot be simply reduced to the impact of globalization, internationalism, or historical legacy.

In my approach I looked at the different voices in Haret Hanania of residents, shopkeepers and investors as well as other neighborhoods of the Old City undergoing change. I was interested in getting the "narratives" of the place from as many sources possible but also how the changes in one neighborhood affect others. I also interviewed the various actors involved in the making of place inside and outside the Old City. I also focused on ethnographic and historic data. Hence, the sources for this dissertation are primarily from ethnographical and historical research methods: interviews, participant-observation, case histories, and archival research. I also wrote notes from the several tours I took either formally or informally of the Old City.

My ethnographic data is the outcome of the dozens of interviews I have conducted over the course of fieldwork. Most of the interviews were based on open-ended questions. Some, especially those with officials and administrators were more formal with set questions and usually there was no follow-up. I conducted interviews with officials administrators, architects, residents, business owners, those interested in investing in the Old City, those concerned about its future, and those who were transients like me. Interviews were held in offices, people's homes, and restaurants or cafes. After an initial negative reaction to tape recording interviews, I managed to tape record only four of the thirty-six I conducted, I eventually decided not to even ask if I could tape

record. I took notes when possible or reconstructed the interview afterwards. I would return to the interviewee if I had questions or needed further clarifications.

It proved challenging when it came to dealing with how to identify informants in the dissertation. I decided to maintain the anonymity of most of my informants and used pseudonyms. In these instances I only gave a first name. In some cases where the interview was conducted with a public or official figure, or a person whose views were well publicized I used their real full name. I am concerned with protecting my sources and would rather err on the side of caution rather than be unwittingly involved in causing people undue duress for having spoken to me.

Participant observation proved to be the most valuable source of information on the nuances of daily life in the historic quarters. I have decided to live in the Old City after finding suitable accommodations during the first week after my arrival in 2003. I spent 13 months sharing, enjoying, and enduring with residents what I affectionately began calling the "hood." I know what it is like to buy groceries and carry them home in the cold of the winter and in the heat of the summer, the losing battle with mud and dust, and the dripping laundry on your head. There were also the dangers of navigating the narrow alleys with cars that insisted on squeezing through.

There were also the social events of hanging out in the "hood" with the neighbors, walking in the evenings with the girls arm in arm, avoiding the heckling of the young men who gather at main squares and street corners in what is locally known as *maktab* (office), observing and participating in the Christian Easter, and the transformation of the "hood" with the seasons from summer to winter and back again. After a while it was not

just fieldwork, rather I was living there and becoming a part of the ḥārah as much as possible. I noticed the change in how I was being introduced from *al-'jnabīh* (the foreigner) or *al-'mrīkīh* (the American) to *jāritnā* (our neighbor) by my landlady and neighbors in the alley where I lived.

Overview

In the following chapters I illustrate the ways in which discourses of modernity surrounding the Old City are defining the transformations taking place. I also explore the spatial practices of the different social actors engage in the transformations of the Old City as part of their attempts to define what it means to be modern in contemporary Syria. I begin in Chapter Two with a discussion of how the intramural city emerged as a heritage site. I historically trace the distinction that has emerged between Damascus and the Old City. I demonstrate how the appellation Old City is part of the modernity process in Syria and entails a new way of looking at history. This new attitude towards the Old City also encompasses the people who live and work there.

The residents of the Old City remain largely missing from the debates on the future of the city. In Chapter Three I focus on the spatial practices of the residents of the neighborhood Haret Hanania in order to demonstrate how a sense of community and continuity is maintained amidst the urban transformations. I summarize the different ways that spatial practices have encouraged these continuities and in turn undermine discourses that the Old City is a place of decay and backwardness.

I return to discourses surrounding the people of the Old City in Chapter Four, where I discuss the different notions of what it means to be modern and unmodern. I focus on the cosmopolitan discourse that insists that the residents of the historic city are unable to "appreciate" the rich heritage and history of their neighborhoods. I translate "appreciate" here as being able to invest in the local cityscape on a large scale and make it more attuned to global flows. I focus on the distinctions arising between the locals and the cosmopolitans in their use and definition of space in the Old City.

Chapter Five explores the interventions by government approved private investors who seek to revitalize the neighborhoods and quarters by establishing a "symbolic economy" that caters to the tourist and high class spending. This includes restaurants and art galleries that cater to a select class of people that live outside the historic city. Moreover, the neighborhoods that were largely economically and socially homogenous are beginning to be stratified as cosmopolitans move there. I juxtapose these investment activities with those of the locals to illustrate the different ways a bayt ʻarabi becomes profitable.

In Chapter Six I focus on the different discourses surrounding historical preservation and how it is actually implemented. I intertwine these discourses and practices with how the Old City is a site of memory and remembering yet the rights to the city and this memory is being contested. I again ground these discourses and practices around the bayt ʻarabī. As the Old City became old and traditional so did the courtyard house but now it is increasingly being viewed as an "ethnographic object" though for many locals it is still home in the very modern sense.

Chapter Seven concludes by beginning with the current situation of the Old City and what the future may hold. As I was finishing my fieldwork a new law that ended rent control in Syria came into effect which might have serious ramifications on the demography of the Old City. I also look at the significance of my project in the wider discourses of urban anthropology, anthropology of the Middle East in general, and the emerging field of Syrian ethnography in particular.

Chapter Two: "With You Begins and Ends Creation:"[12] the Making of the Old City of Damascus

In this chapter I illustrate how the intramural urban area of Damascus became designated as the Old City through the process of modernization that swept the region beginning in the late 1800s. I trace the modernization initiated by the Ottomans in the 19th century that led to the emergence of this part of Damascus as the Old City. Many of the buildings in existence today in the Old City are from this period when the Ottomans were introducing new modern urban spaces. Thus the current restoration of vernacular old buildings is the latest phase in the modernity and tradition discourse that has been unfolding on the cityscape of the Old City for over a century.

This chapter is one of layers. I begin with a brief history of Damascus from its early beginnings, 5000 years ago, to the present in order to illustrate the role of the past in the current modernity project of the Old City. This history is also the ṭabaqāt that are currently visible in the cityscape palimpsest of the various eras. I offer a different narration for the history of Damascus that tends to focus on the significance of the past in the present within the discourses of modernity instead of straightforward narration of events.[13] See for example (Burns 2005; Degeorge 2005; Rafeq 1966).[14]

[12] From a poem by Nizar Qabbani entitled "Gold Inlays on a Shwam Sword" (1995:106). All translations are the author's.
[13] The edited volume Alsayyad (et al. 2005) offers a similar undertaking to the development of medieval Cairo as such.
[14] The same holds true for the histories of the neighborhoods and quarters. For example see (Khoury 1983; Moaz 1998).

The second layer in this chapter is how the historical development of the Old City as such included the different layered discourses of modernity. Beginning with the Ottoman period modernity as project relied on the dialectical relationship between the West and non-West but there was also an internal relationship between the different local interpretations of modernity. For the Ottomans it was not only a process of negotiation between East and West but also a process of contestation within the local context. Currently in Syria there are different ṭabaqāt of modernity as articulated by the officials, cosmopolitans, and locals. These different interpretations can co-exists until a moment of crisis emerges such as the current geopolitical situation where Syria is perceived as a "rogue" state by the West. In order to combat external influences, the state grows less tolerant of the local interpretations of modernity and moves to impose its own version. It does this through modernization projects as in the historic preservation of the Old City. However, this version, as we shall see, cannot depart radically from the history inscribed in the built environment.

A Tour of *Ṭabaqāt*

On June 3, 2004 I went on a private tour of the Old City given by Hans, a German scholar, who had spent several years studying the Old City and developed a detailed knowledge of the different quarters and neighborhoods. The tour was offered mainly to a group of historians who had convened in Damascus for a conference. Although, all of us were familiar to various degrees with the Old City and its history, there was always something new to learn from these tours. On this tour we visited markets, khans, houses

in various stages of restoration, and bathhouses. However, I want to focus on the first part of this tour since it offered an introduction to the Old City and the layers of history found there.

We met at the entrance of Suq Hamidiyah (Hamidiyah Bazaar) in the western part of the intramural city overlooking the bustling street of Al-Thawrah (Revolution St.). In the past Bab al-Nasr (Gate of Victory) stood at this entrance, one of the nine gates of the Old City, but today only the name remains to mark entry to the suq. The Ottomans had torn it down in the late 1880s in their efforts to connect the Old City with the new city center. Hans explained how the suq is one of the longest covered galleries in the world with a distance of almost half a kilometer with shops lining each side. We walked amongst people from all over Syria and the world with hawkers and shopkeepers selling everything from clothing and souvenirs, to men's socks and women's lingerie, to rugs and water pipes.

We paused at certain junctures to listen to Hans' explanation of how the Ottomans were building a modern suq and in the process introduced new building materials and forms modeled on the arcades found in European capitals at the time. He pointed to the steel beam that almost ran the entire length of the suq as an example of new building technology. Shopkeepers and shoppers would glance at our group and try to figure what it is we were looking at. This suq, considered the spirit of the Old City, was the result of the Ottoman attempts to modernize commercial institutions. In 2002 the suq was the focus of a restoration project by the government to revert the marketplace to this Ottoman period. We reached the end of the suq and stood under the remains of the Roman

propylaeum, still impressive after two millennia. These columns once marked the entrance to Jupiter's temple and now signal the end of the suq.

We passed the Byzantine arches, stunted in comparison to the Roman columns, and that in turn once marked the arcade for the Cathedral of St. John. This point is of significant since it marks several of the different eras in the history of Old Damascus. (Figure 3) The Roman columns are almost as high as the metal Ottoman roof but dwarf the Byzantine columns that lead to the shops of the Miskiyeh which are now reduced to stalls after they were razed in 1983 to create a square in front of the Umayyad Mosque (Sacks 1998:187), the fourth holiest site in Islam. These vendors mark the oldest continuously occupied suq in the Old City from the time of the Mamelukes almost 1000 years ago. Beyond Miskiyeh stood the main entrance for worshippers to the Umayyad Mosque. Tourists have another entrance to the left of this one.

In this 30 minute walk we had covered 5000 years of history. Though many of us have walked this route several times Hans' extensive knowledge of the Ottoman period brought many issues to life mainly how history can be studied spatially in the Old City.

Figure 3: Miskiyeh Square[15]
This is one of the few spots in Damascus where several different civilizations are read on the cityscape: Roman, Byzantine, Mameluke, Ottoman, and Syrian

Hans is not the only person I encountered who had an intimate knowledge of the Old City. Ahmed a historian, had studied history at Damascus University and is now a specialist on the history of the Old City. His professor would take his class on field trips to the Old City and tell them "We are taking lessons in the open, we are going to history." She would lecture to them as they walked in the Old City of many layers, which to her

[15] Unless noted, all photographs were taken by the author.

was an infinite source of education better than textbooks. Although he admitted to me, at the time he thought his history professor was batty, over the course of the years he had come to appreciate what she was trying to instill in her students; how history is best understood spatially.

As Haitham Hakki, one of the leading contemporary Syrian TV and film directors told me "the past is powerfully present in the life of Arab peoples." Part of this assertion is true because the past exists in the built environment. Burns echoes a similar sentiment in his attempt to reconstruct the history of Damascus. "In the course of the investigation, the city itself is the basic document. The story told here is not reconstructed by the careful sifting of ancient texts or inscriptions…In Damascus, every layer of history has built precisely on top of its predecessor for at least three millennia" (Burns 2005:xx).

Ahmed was one of my mentors in navigating the Old City, past and future. I would go to his office in the Old City and he would talk to me about the history of the Old City. His office was in a bayt ʿarabī in the Old City. Sitting there I could smell watermelon seeds roasting from the nearby stores and hear children in the schoolyard next door, the sound of joyful play mixed with the soothing burble of the water fountain in the courtyard below. He gave me articles and books to read. He cautioned me many times to "pay attention to what so and so says. It is not true but it is important to know what mistakes people make so you don't make them as well," or "be careful in reading this one, there are many false assumptions" and we discussed the book or article in question where he points mistakes and inaccuracies. His biggest concerns were with

what he perceived as false interpretations of the urban landscape and what this meant in terms of ethnic, religious, and class relations.

However, my favorite part of my meetings with Ahmed was when he took me on tours to different parts of the Old City to the monuments but also the vernacular buildings. He described the ways in which each construction had a story to tell. It became apparent that what many history books missed was how the Old City retained many of the traces of previous civilizations in the built environment, if you knew where to look. Ahmed taught me not only how to read history texts but also the cityscape. "Look at the wall can you see where there was once a door and now it is blocked?" and I would follow the outline of what was once a door but was later sealed.

This reading of history as it appeared in the cityscape is being threatened in some places by the historic preservation project. As an organic entity the Old City had retained the traces of the transformations in the built environment. With the current historic preservation project these various layers were reduced in number. With an emphasis on aesthetics a sealed door is not allowed under the current guidelines. If this house underwent historic preservation the door would be opened so the structure could assume its perceived original form. I will discuss this process in Chapter Six but what I want to highlight how the organic growth of the city is reduced and hindered.

As a historian, Ahmed advised me to "write history from the vocabulary of history." The vocabulary of history as he explained was the cityscape with its buildings and monuments from several empires and civilizations that show more or less continuity in civilization and people. He meant I should be attuned not only to the local

architectural elements, but to the continuity in this history over the course of the centuries and to the present. Ahmed is an Arab, but not a Syrian, yet Damascus is important to him because of its early Semitic inhabitants and role as a major Arab and Islamic capital.

Early History

The Aramaeans (1000-520 BC) are the first empire to establish their capital in Damascus. Though it may difficult to prove that Damascus is the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world, it is almost certainly the oldest continuously inhabited capital. The Aramaeans were a Semitic group that managed to consolidate their power and establish a kingdom in southern Syria. It was during this period that Damascus underwent massive public works that remained in place to this day. The Aramaeans undertook the building of water canals and irrigation systems that enhanced the productivity of the fields surrounding Damascus and built the seven waterways of Barada River, the main source of water for the city, and which are still in place to this day to ensure a steady supply of water for the city (Burns 2005:13).[16]

The Aramaeans built a temple for their god Hadad on a mount that has remained the main religious site for all the civilizations that followed. Currently the Umayyad Mosque is on the site. The construction material of mud, straw and wood for vernacular buildings can be dated from this era (Burns 2005:15). They have remained in use until the advent of modern building material such as cement and steel in the 19th century. It was expected to use these materials since they were abundant in the area. The mud came

[16] For more information on the water works of the Aramaeans see Degeorge (2005:7-10) and Burns (2005:13-16).

from the flooding of the Barada River, the wood and straw from the fields around the city. Since Damascus has a short winter and long summer with dry hot winds blowing in from the desert the courtyard house proved to be the most suitable style of architecture for this kind of climate and topography (Al-Nahawi 2000:349).[17] The courtyard and the fountain, as I will explain in the coming chapters, have a cooling effect. This form of construction is considered the result of the ingenuity of local builders before the advent of electricity.[18]

The connection between the Aramaean city and modern Damascus cannot be ignored by Ahmed. As a Semitic people who first made Damascus their capital there is a continuity between the ancient and the modern inhabitants of Damascus, which also translates into continuity of civilization. During our walks in the Old City Ahmed kept emphasizing the "oneness of civilization" to me. Though there are no physical remains of the Aramaeans in the current cityscape, they are an essential layer of history for the city because of their legacy. They designated the areas that were used for worship and commerce, the main activities in Damascus to this day. Although there were no vernacular buildings that exist beyond the late Ottoman period the same building material has been in use for almost three millennia. Therefore, the Aramaeans put forth the first vocabulary with which the text of Damascus was to be rewritten several times over before a new vocabulary came into use to create a different text as we will see below. Although this has created what could be called a rupture, there was also continuity with

[17] Manuela Römer provided the translation for parts of this article from the German.
[18] Fitch mentions that "mud masonry remains environmentally the optimal material for hot, dry climates and requires no cash outlay for raw materials" (Fitch 2001:25).

the past that remained important. In Syria the modernity project could never sever all ties with the past, to do so would seriously jeopardize future claims to authority and legitimacy. The past served as support for the modernization process as we shall see.

The Romans are the second significant civilization in the history of Damascus since they were the earliest civilization whose physical remains are still visible in the city. They built a temple for Jupiter over the Aramaean temple for Hadad and Greek temple for Zeus. The remains of the western entrance to the temple, the propylaeum, can still be seen today, but there are columns and walls embedded in houses and stores that surround the mosque area. Even the propylaeum was not entirely visible until 1983 when the buildings in front of the mosque were demolished to create the current square. European travelers to Damascus during the 18th and 19th century came looking for the Roman columns in between shwām houses that were incorporated in the local architecture (Burns 2005:26).[19]

Travel by Europeans since the 18th century was a movement not only in space but in time where they searched for the decaying present juxtaposed with the remains of the glorious past. Fabian discussed how European travelers to non-Western sites looking for ancient ruins contributed to "the secularization of Time" (Fabian 1983:6) a step towards modernity. Their presence in these countries was a reflection of growing attitudes towards time as linear and progressive. These travelers assumed a superior knowledge to

[19] Keenan (2000)has a picture depicting the columns embedded in a building with only their top arch exposed. Perhaps one of the reasons that the Roman ruins still exist in Damascus is because they were incorporated into the buildings of subsequent civilizations which protected them.

understanding the past and viewed the locals as inferior and living in decaying circumstances amongst ancient ruins (10). These descriptions were aimed at the Ottoman Empire and its subjects. I will illustrate later in this chapter, that once the Ottomans adopted the European notion of "Time" in its linear manifestations they too assumed a superior knowledge and began to view in turn their subjects as inferior. Thus we see how the interaction of modernity between East and West led to the emergence of Time but that also within the Ottoman Empire a similar process was taking place as regards its own subjects.

During my fieldwork the Roman Corinthian columns had huge metal clamps around their circumference to protect them from decomposition. An architect working on their maintenance told me water was somehow seeping into the stone. A big chunk of one of the columns had broken off and lay on the ground until a worker could repair it. As it lay there waiting to be pieced back, a street vender with his bucket of crab apples was sitting on it. I looked at him in utter surprise, thinking this is a piece of the Roman column part of the propylaeum that served as the western entrance to the temple of Jupiter that at that time was considered a magnificent edifice. A column that is more than 2000 years old and a man is sitting on it. Before I could say anything he thrust two bags of crab apple at me and said "only 25 (50 cents)." I laughed and walked on. The past has different meanings to different people. For some, it is a place on which to sit when tired, but I was still consumed by the narratives of the "glorious" past that were reiterated in my tours of the Old City.

The Umayyad dynasty was also important to the present day Old City. Although it only lasted for 90 years (661-751 AD), the presence of the Umayyads in Damascus made it the most important capital city of their world (Kurd Ali:15), a notion that is still invoked in modern day Syria. The current Syrian regime sees itself in many ways as the natural successor to the Umayyad dynasty despite the 1500 intervening years since both have a common Arab identity and pan-Arab agenda. Of the many buildings they constructed only one survives, the most important, the Umayyad Mosque which is now the heart of the Old City though not at its center constructed over the remains of the Byzantine cathedral which in turn stood over the Roman Temple and initially the Aramaean shrine.[20]

Several empires followed the Umayyad and of note I will mention the Mamelukes (1260-1516 AD) since many of the historic public buildings from that era are still present. It was also during their rule that a distinct style of building with alternating black and white stone came into fashion. Another art form that became distinctly Syrian, ’*blaq* was first introduced during this period (Weber 1997-1998:447). ’blaq refers to the intricate arabesque design carved in stone and filled with colored paste. (Figure 4) I will also talk more about these decorations in Chapter Six when I discuss the historical preservation of houses. The Mamelukes were also a precursor for the Ottomans that eventually wrestled Syria from them in 1516 and for the next 400 years Damascus became a provincial capital of the Ottoman Empire.

[20] See Flood (2001)for a very detailed and interesting account of the significance of building the mosque.

Figure 4: ’Blaq
An example of ’blaq design in the courtyard of the Danish Institute in the Old City

Ottomans and the First Stirrings of Modernity

The Ottomans are not popular in Syria or the rest of the Middle East for that matter. Books are replete with how they led to the degradation of the Arab Middle East (Kurd Ali:31-41). As one of my informants told me “the Ottomans and the Mongols are the only two empires in the world that gave nothing to civilization. Five hundred years and nothing, not even a book.” One of my friends cautioned that what I read in history books about the Ottomans portraying them in a positive light was not true. “The Ottomans left us with everything backward and underdeveloped. They were horrible

creating problems between the different religions. They introduced the segregation of men and women with this whole thing of *haremlik* and *salemlik."*[21] In these assessments of the Ottomans there is this belief that the Ottomans have contributed to the decay of the present.

These are some of the local and contemporary interpretations of history. This discourse that the Ottomans ushered in a period of decline and degeneration remains strong among many Syrians who still experience the impact of the demise of the Ottoman Empire. It is also perpetuated by the current regime. The collapse of the empire led to the French colonization of Syria. This colonization in turn demarcated the current boundaries for the nation-state and which created a truncated country from Greater Syria that once encompassed parts of present day Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Israel.[22]

However, many researchers have shown that urban life flourished under the Ottomans especially during the later periods of their rule when urban expansion and growth in Damascus took place. Damascus expanded from 212 to 313 hectares (523,852 to 773,423 acres) from the beginning of Ottoman rule in the 16th century until the 19th that corresponded to an increase in the population from 52 to 90 thousand (Raymond 1984:5-7). The Ottomans were in Damascus for a significant period of time and did more to alter the cityscape than any other empires not only due to the longevity of their rule but

[21] These terms apply to sections of houses especially the big ones that belonged to the upper classes and become popular in the late 1800s. The *Haremlik* refers to the area of the house where women spent their time separated for all intents and purposes from the *Salemlik* the section of the house where the men lived and entertained.

[22] I remember once I was in the Archives and a researcher there asked me about my origins. When she wondered if I were Syrian, I said I was not but that my parents where from Palestine. She said it does not matter. It is all Greater Syria.

because the city became one of their important provincial capitals.[23] As the city prospered and the population increased, new neighborhoods emerged.

The stability and prosperity ushered by the Ottomans led to the expansion of the city outside the walls. In the beginning the new neighborhoods were the natural expansion of the old one, overrunning the wall and therefore bore the same name but with an adjective indicating if it was inside or outside the wall. For example in the south saw the growth of Shaghour Barrani (Outer Shaghour) to its inner wall counterpart Shaghour Jouwany (Inner Shaghour). In the north there is Amara Barraniyeh the outgrowth of Amara Jowanīh as well as new neighborhoods like Al-Qassab. Al-Midan grew in the 19th century due to influx of peasants from Ḥaurān and became the location of grain houses and markets linking the city to the hinterland (Schilcher 1985:19).

The increase in population also led to the creation of new neighborhoods further away from the walls, as in the case of Qanawat and Suq Saruja. Qanawat, the Arabic name for the Roman aqueducts that flowed into the city, lies outside the western wall. It became a neighborhood for the rich who wanted to move from the congested city during the 19th century. Many of the courtyard houses in this quarter are bigger and more elaborately decorated than the ones found within the walls. Ottoman officials founded Suq Saruja outside the northern gates which was nicknamed "little Istanbul" since many Ottoman officials lived there (Moaz 1998).

All the neighborhoods outside the wall have witnessed massive reconstruction in the 20th century as dozens of courtyard houses were destroyed in the 1970s and 1980s to

[23] For a history of Damascus during the Ottomans see Rafeq (1966).

build modern apartment complexes, office buildings, and highways. Suq Saruja has been the site of some of the fiercest battles between preservationists and real estate developers. This neighborhood is located in the middle of present day commercial Damascus. Now it stands part deserted, part reconstructed, and part hanging on.[24] Modern multistory buildings tower over crumbling courtyard houses.[25]

These extramural neighborhoods are significant for several reasons. First they indicate how the prosperity and stability ushered in by the Ottomans led to the expansion of Damascus beyond the walls. Second this expansion was in keeping with the historic social and urban fabric that existed within the walls and included the same vernacular architecture; courtyard houses, winding narrow streets, and dead end alleys. People were living in similar neighborhoods to the ones they left behind albeit in larger houses since there was more space outside the city walls. Damascus until the Ottoman period was largely within the walls, with large tracts of land outside the gates. Therefore, there was plenty of space for the city to expand. As Burns explained there was not need for it to "cannibalise its past. Damascus has thus guarded its traditions perhaps more than any other of the great cities in the Middle East outside Cairo, unconsciously preserving in the process much which in other centres has been imprudently abandoned, especially this century" (Burns 1999:79).

[24] See Khost (1989).
[25] Some in Syria argue that property owners deliberately let their courtyard houses crumble and decay so that they can demolish them and sell them to real estate developers. Others say the government does not facilitate the process of obtaining permits for the maintenance of courtyard houses and are in agreement with developers.

The intramural city remained interconnected with these neighborhoods. Whether inside or outside the walls, the city was called Damascus with the word *baṭin (* inner) or *ẓāher (* outer) added to locate neighborhoods. Furthermore, the spiritual center and main markets remained around the Umayyad Mosque. Thus although people lived outside the walls the main administrative buildings and marketplaces remained inside the walls. But this did not remain the case for long as change was sweeping the world and enveloping the Ottoman Empire.

Ottoman Modern

In the early 1850 the Ottomans were feeling the danger of remaining outside the project of modernity especially in face of the more technologically advanced Europeans. They began to see their way of governing as a handicap if they were to resist European hegemony and encroachment on their empire. Europe was not above meddling in the affairs of the Ottoman Empire especially in the provinces. After the events of 1860 when Christians in Lebanon and Damascus were slaughtered by Druze and Muslims the Ottomans could not ward off the British and French meddling, in the name of protecting minorities.[26] In response they introduced major reforms in Syria and Lebanon where,

> Ottoman reformers aspired towards an elusive modernity which they thought was within their grasp if only they could deflect external European hostility which retarded Ottoman advancement while also

[26] For more information about this event see Tarazi (1994).

> identifying and eliminating internal premodern problems which invited European interference. (Makdisi 2002:32)

This "elusive modernity" led to the modernization of Damascus through urban renewal and planning programs. Modernity for the Ottomans was mainly a tactical strategy for survival in face of European hegemony. The prevailing ideology then, among the Ottomans, insisted that if they modernized they could become as powerful as the Europeans and be able to withstand their aggression. But caught in the modernizing projects, Ottomans also assumed the ideology associated with modernity and began to look differently at their Arab provinces. Instead of seeing subjects of the empire they saw objects of imperialism-their *own* imperialism. It is at this point that Ottomans adapted the concept of secular, western Time and began to view history in terms of the glorious past and decaying present.

According to Mitchell, modernity is associated with place, the West, where presumably it had its origins, and to be modern became synonymous with being western (2000:1). But modernity is also located in place specifically in urban settings and it is in cities where modernity is expressed and articulated. The urban setting figures predominately in the process of modernity (Harvey 1990; Rabinow 1989). It is the congested and impoverished European cities of the 1800s that led to new "modernist practices and thinking" (Harvey 1990:25) with the cityscape emerging as the canvas on which ideas and behaviors were implemented in an effort to create new modern subjects (Mitchell 1991). For example, the "haussmanization" of Paris ushered in new forms of public spaces and spatial practices that reorganized social and economic life in the city

(Harvey 1985:73). Furthermore, it is in cities and colonial cities in particular, where experiments in social control and forms of knowledge formulated new perceptions of social modernity (Fuller 1992; Rabinow 1989; Wright 1991).

Reflecting these processes, modernization for the Ottomans entailed major urban renewal programs as in Istanbul.[27] But the "provincial, urban experience of Ottoman modernity encompassed a variety of human sensibilities that reflected the specific and changing meanings of space, time and being" (Hanssen, et al. 2002:8) that included looking at the provinces as backward and Europe as the model of progress and modernity (Hanssen, et al. 2002:9). For the Ottomans tradition, the opposite of their modernity, was found in their empire among the provinces including Damascus (Makdisi 2002:32). At the same time their Arab subjects were engaged in their own modernity project and developed a national ethos regardless of religious affiliation based on Arabness (Burns 2005:265).

However, the modernization in Damascus was not entirely top-down, and the Syrians were not passive recipients of Ottoman modernization. They were active in the process as well and not only in developing national aspirations. The Ottomans modernized Damascus during this period by widening roads facilitating easy access for the new forms of transportation, such as tram and cars, from and to the intramural city. Bab Touma and Al-Amin Street were widened to improve traffic circulation and movement (Sacks 1998:191). Furthermore, new market areas were built in the European style of arcades and galleries, as the Suq Hamadiyah, mentioned earlier. This suq

[27] See Celik (1986) for discussion on the modernization of Istanbul.

connected the historic religious and market center to the new city being established outside the western end of the walls at Marjeh Square in what has been called the "Haussmanization of Damascus" (Degeorge 2005:258).

In their urban planning the Ottomans were highly influenced with the exposition held in Europe and America throughout the second half of the 19th century and early 20th. At these expositions Ottomans and Arabs were exposed to how the West represented the East (Celik 1992; Mitchell 1988). The impact of these world fairs led to new ways of organizing the urban setting to fit these representations (Celik 1992:10). Mitchell described this process succinctly:

> The rebuilding of Cairo and other Middle Eastern cities according to the principle of the exhibition was intended, therefore, like the construction of exhibitions and exhibition-like cities in Europe, to promote the global economic and political transformation …, and to symbolise its accomplishment. In other words the new façades of the city, like the display of commodities at the exhibition, could be taken as a series of signs or representations, as we say, of the larger economic changes 'underneath'. (Mitchell 1988:17-18)

The Ottomans built a new administrative center in Marjeh Square that included the municipality, police head quarters, law courts and other public buildings (Weber 2002:147). New residential neighborhoods such as Mouhajirin on the slopes of Mount Qasyun *w*ere built with right angled streets instead of winding alleys. These new areas not only broke with centuries of historical continuity by moving the center of the city

outside the walls, they also introduced new building material cement, concrete and steel, the materials of modernity. Houses now assumed a new style different from the historic courtyard house based on the *Konak* in Anatolia where there is no inner opening and the courtyard becomes the central hall with rooms around it (Weber 2002:151). This is one of the first ruptures with the past where since the Aramaean period there was continuity in building material.

Modernization was not just in the physical layout of the city. Residents of both the intramural and extramural quarters and neighborhoods of Damascus, were renovating their houses to reflect the changing tastes in furniture and interior decoration based on what it meant to be modern (Reilly 1991; Weber 1997-1998, 2002). Qassatli writing around the 1800s mentioned how most rooms in a courtyard houses were now furnished with western furniture. In some homes there were rooms with eastern furniture (Qassatli 2004 (1879):165). This indicated a growing sensibility of "modern" and "tradition" though at the time the terms used were "European" and "oriental" (Reilly 1991:6).

The shwām who lived in the Old City were also adopting new manners of behavior, clothing, houses and architecture (Weber 2002). They were defining what it meant to be modern through new consumption habits and had developed a different interpretation of modernity than the Ottoman's main project. Coincidently, it is these houses of the late Ottoman period that were undergoing different forms of modernization that are currently being considered traditional and the target of historic preservation and restoration efforts. Therefore, we can see how one period's modernity becomes another's tradition. Another layer added to all this is the emergence of the intramural city as

traditional although it was being modernized. However, its physical layout and courtyard houses contrasted sharply with the modern, western-inspired neighborhoods and buildings.

As the city was being modernized the monuments and buildings from previous civilizations like the Romans, which were considered part of the cityscape and even incorporated into peoples homes, were now being designated as monuments and heritage. Modernization of the province was inspiring Arabs to become aware of their past (Burns 2005:264). Syrians were deeply influenced by the Germans: Kaiser Wilhelm II visited Syria in 1898 and found the tomb of Saladin in the Old City near the Umayyad Mosque in a state of neglect and ruin. In what is considered to be the first recorded act of historic preservation in Damascus, he provided the funds for its restoration (Ball 1994:60). This probably led the Ottomans to begin designating and preserving monuments on their own. Although the last Ottoman ruler of Damascus, Jamal Pasha, held the Arabs in contempt he was not above modernizing them through instilling in them an awareness of their past. During World War I he implemented several public works, urban renewal and cultural education programs aimed at modernizing the Arabs.[28] The German consultants he hired to assist him in this process were pressing upon him to preserve monuments.[29] Through the designation of historical monuments and their preservation efforts the Ottomans were reconstructing history to give legitimacy to their presence in Syria (Kayali 1998:306).

[28] See Kayali (1998).
[29] The first survey of Damascus historical sites and monuments was conducted by two Germans, Watzinger and Wulzinger, who published after WWI two volumes on the heritage of the city (Watzinger and Wulzinger 1921-1924).

At the end of the Ottoman rule Damascus was different than when they first arrived in 1516. Although most of what had occurred was natural expansion due to population increase, a departure to certain degree from the "vocabulary of history" was beginning to take place. The center of Damascus shifted away from the intramural city and the relationship between the Old City and the new city was altered drastically. I now turn to the French colonial period where many of these policies remained in effect and led to the further isolation of the Old City from the rest of Damascus.

French Colonization

The French arrived in Syria with vast colonial experience in North Africa and Southeast Asia, where they developed sophisticated urban planning policies that encompassed juxtaposing but isolating the historic city from the modern neighborhood (Abu Lughod 1980; Rabinow 1989; Wright 1991). This visual and spatial separation demonstrated the superiority of the modern neighborhood, where they lived as occupiers. The French neighborhoods were distinguished by the improved sanitation and traffic circulation compared with the historic areas. The French were interested in the preservation of local cultural and customs that they saw as distinct and different from their own but they hoped that through neglect these areas would eventually cease to exist (Eickelman 1981:275). They were also interested in demonstrating a "historical continuity that is an impediment to change" (Hamadeh 1992:242). The French were actively involved in the development of the idea of traditional as incompatible with the modern. They began to circulate the notion that Muslims did not want to live among the

French thereby justifying why these two separate cities had to exist side by side (Hamadeh 1992:252).

When the French arrived in Damascus they designated the intramural section as the traditional city since it was clearly delineated by the wall, reinforcing what the Ottomans began. But whereas the Ottomans and the Syrians were modernizing the houses and intramural neighborhoods the French neglected the Old City. The French colonial officials and civilians lived outside the Old City in the new neighborhoods they had founded alongside the quarters built by the Ottomans. Most of the resources went to these neighborhoods.

Under French occupation the Syrians developed a strong national identity that was first articulated under the Ottomans (Khoury 1983; Thompson 2000). This identity began to be centered on the intramural city, a process the French policy inadvertently encouraged by isolating the Old City from the newer neighborhoods. Although there was a growing belief among many Syrians that the Old City was traditional and not modern, they still considered it the bastion of modern concepts such as nationalism and patriotism, and a symbol of Syrian national identity. Many of the Syrian leaders of the revolt and resistance against French still resided in the Old City amongst their supporters (Khoury 1993).

The French arrived in Damascus in 1920 as a conquering force that dashed the hopes of the Syrians to have their own independent state after the demise of the Ottoman Empire. From the very beginning their presence was unwelcome and Syrians resisted their presence. It eventually took the French five years before they were able to subdue

Syrian rebels. During this time the city was in a very turbulent state. The rebellion eventually subsided when the French aggressively bombed several areas of Damascus including the Old City and Al-Midan.

One of these intramural neighborhoods, Sidi Amoud south of Suq Hamadiyah, was completely destroyed. My Syrian friend told me that this quarter housed the richest men of Damascus who were bankrolling the insurgency. The French wanted to strike at the economic center of Damascus and Sidi Amoud lay in ruins for three years before the French rebuilt it in an effort to appease local sentiment and erase the events from the collective memory of the people (Fries 1993:54). The French in rebuilding the neighborhood used a different urban pattern and construction materials since they saw their role as civilizing agents similar to their work in North Africa.

This is one of the first complete rupture in the physical layout of the Old City that reinforced the continuity of earlier forms. The French rebuilt Sidi Amoud to include a square in the middle around which they constructed right angled street with four and five story buildings on the street making it "a foreign element, a section hard to integrate with the city structure" (Sacks 1998:194). Thus it is easily distinguishable on maps of the old city as the anomalous part (Figure 5).

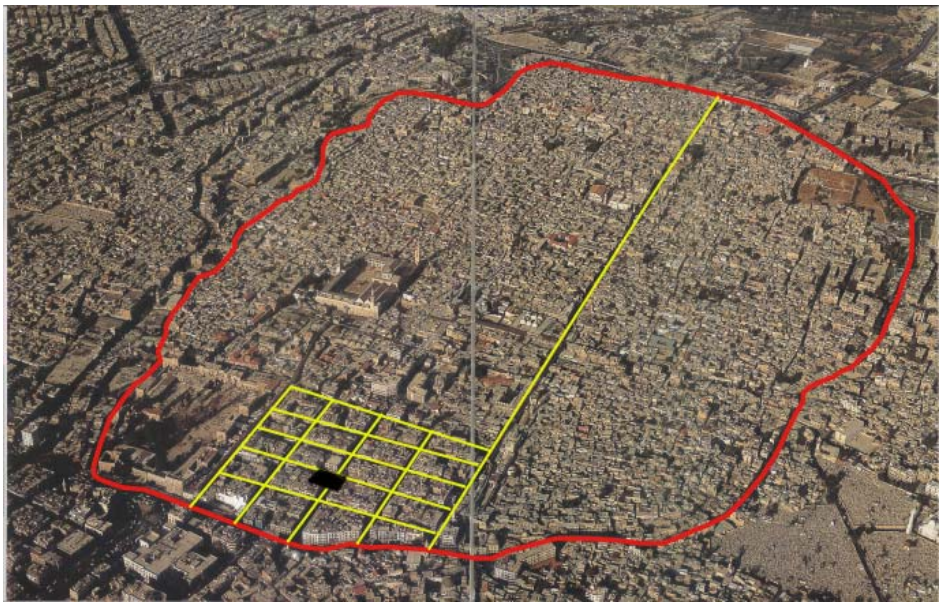

Figure 5: Arial View of the Old City
This photograph is adapted from Degeorge 2005, shows the wall in red around the Old City and Hariqa in yellow. The black center is the square. The yellow line that runs the length of the Old City is Straight Street.

This rupture had serious political ramifications in the Old City and beyond. It served as a constant reminder of French brutality which led nationalists to cling to their winding alleys and courtyard houses in defiance of the new urban order the colonist were imposing on the Old City. To this day the area is known as Hariqa and not Sidi Amoud. Hariqa (fire) serves as a constant reminder of the bombardment by the occupying forces.[30]

The French were active in the mapping of the city and cataloging the heritage sites, thereby continuing what the Germans began under the Ottomans. Their efforts such

[30] Incidentally the neighborhood that was bombed in Al-Midan was rebuilt by the Syrians as it was before the bombardment with courtyard houses and winding alleys.

as that by the French archeologist Jean Sauvaget on Damascus remains the main reference on the history of the city.[31] He was among the first to suggest the grid plan for the city where it could be detected in the present-day Old City and his theories have not been challenged to this day. Many of the Syrians that worked with the French such as Khaled Maoz who actually worked with Sauvaget on documenting Damascus, became among the first advocates for the preservation of the Old City.

In the cadastral map the French painstakingly plotted each house in the city depicting in minute detail the location of doors, windows, courtyard, fountain, thickness of walls, etc. Today these maps serve as the reference for any preservation project in the city. As a matter of fact preservation is interpreted as reverting a building to its original dimensions according to the cadastral map. Any additions to the building not included in the French plan are considered anomalous to the integrity of the construction and should be removed. I will return to this topic in Chapter Six.

By the time the French left Syria in 1946, the intramural city was widely perceived as old, traditional, and unmodern as well as the locus of resistance against the French. The detailed mapping and cataloguing of the heritage sites in the Old City encouraged thinking of the intramural city as historic. Degeorge says that the mandate modernity "triggered a complete rupture with the past" (2005:286), but this was not entirely the case. It did happen in Hariqa but this only made the Syrians attached to their historic neighborhoods. The French were also interested in expressing a historical continuity that demonstrated a mentality that is unyielding to change. They continued to

[31] See Sauvaget (1932).

widen roads along Bab Touma and Amin St for the movement of vehicular traffic in and out of the intramural city. They also introduced a new vocabulary when talking about the historic city in terms of health and hygiene. Hence, the idea that the Old City was unhealthy and dirty contributed to its image as a declining urban center whose role and future in a modern state was debatable. What also began in this period was the projection of traditional on not only the intramural city but the people who choose to live there. It was part of the colonial discourse to equated spatial organization with mentality where "colonial ethnographers considered the confusing-from a European perspective-maze of narrow, winding streets and blind alleys of traditional North African cities…to be a direct spatial projection of the "alogical" disorder of the "indigenous mentality" (Eickelman 1981:269).

In this process of orientalist thinking we see the ways in which the split between people and the built environment began to take shape. The houses built in the historic style and local building materials were considered heritage and historic if they were not occupied. Hence, they should be protected and preserved as testimony to a glorious past. Here again was the notion of decaying ruins and the romanticism it inspires. However, if people lived in these decaying houses the inhabitants, as well as the houses were labeled as traditional and at the same time unmodern. The Ottomans also thought of the Arabs as backward but believed their situation could be remedied with the right education and rehabilitation programs. This explains the public works and education projects the Ottomans were involved in towards the end of their rule. The juxtaposition of traditional and modern during the French colonial period emphasized the need for isolation. This

isolation was important if either were to survive. Those notions surrounding the inhabitants of the Old City remained after independence.

Syrian Modern

Many of the policies begun by the French concerning the Old City continued under the independent state which further sought to "open" the city to traffic and reduce the tortuous streets in the intramural area. (Celik 1997) reported how in Algeria, French colonial urban policy was considered modern and part of the modernization project that the nation states continued after independence. When the French left Syria, it became more acceptable for many residents of the Old City especially the old and established families to move from the courtyard houses to modern apartment buildings in the new and upscale neighborhoods like Abu Roumaneh and Malki.

The abandonment of the Old City happened for several reasons. Many of these residents were seeking a new lifestyle in the modern neighborhoods where they could own their apartment and park their car in front of the building, instead of living in a house with several extended family members on crowded narrow alleys. As Hikmat Shatta, whose family left for a modern neighborhood in 1950s explained:

> My family like the rest followed the fashion; it was like the domino effect and based on practical reasons. But I also think that there are social reasons. The move was done in the name of modernity and development. Old Houses are backward…Cars need wide roads not alleys of the Old City. Many people say they left for practical reasons. The bayt ʻarabī is

> difficult to clean and maintain. Houses are not adaptive to modern life. In my opinion all these reasons are not real, they have some truth in them but the real reason is how I want to project myself in this debate between modernity and tradition. So when my family left like the others they had these reasons.

Shatta has since returned to the Old City as part of the growing number of Syrians who want to live in the historic neighborhoods or work there. I will talk about these individuals in Chapters Four and Five. In this quote he refers to the discourses of modernity prevalent among residents of the Old City where to be modern one had to abandon the courtyard house. However, the Old City was not deserted when its inhabitants left but became populated with villagers who began their exodus from the rural areas to the capital in search of employment. The cheap rent was attractive to tenants and the big courtyard houses that could house as many as 30 families meant landlord did not have to maintain the property. Some residential neighborhoods were transformed into commercial districts and houses were converted into offices, warehouses, and stores.

When many of the residents of the Old City with political clout and connections moved, the intramural city started to be neglected by authorities. More resources were poured into the newer neighborhoods. Traditional became a synonym for heritage found in the built environment, if it was not lived in. Houses that were occupied by several families were considered backward and unmodern. Whereas the French were creating a static historical present the Syrians were referencing a decaying present.

An international UNESCO Committee visited Syria in the summer of 1953 and issued a report the same year calling for the preservation of the Old City because of the unique concentration of monuments and heritage sites in a relatively small area. There was no mention of the vernacular buildings. The committee cautioned that preservation does not entail condoning or allowing urban decay:

> It is with no doubt that there are many elements that have no value and are parasitic establishments and unhealthy in the old neighborhoods. This is only natural because the Old City has its disease and aliments like any living being. However, the elimination of these harmful elements requires detailed care and proper assessment of all that needs to be amended or eliminated (Al-lajneh Unesco 1953:38).

The report did not go into more detail about this, but it did express bafflement at the proposal by the government to demolish large tracts within the Old City which it was supposed to preserve. This plan was circulating to improve the circulation of traffic and expose the main monuments, especially the Umayyad Mosque, from its surroundings. Hakki explained this prevailing discourse to demolish large areas in the historic city center:

> There is an opinion that would like a clear cut with the past all of it because it is the place of backwardness and there is a struggle in the Arab world as you know on the topic of the past. Now you see the struggle in bombs that go off with a struggle that is 1400 years old. …

> Some people who have this great desire to modernize and become more modern. If you have watched films during the era of Jamal Abdul Nasser [Egyptian president from 1954 until 1970] there is one film that talks about an old neighborhood and the movie ends with bulldozers razing the old neighborhood and modern building blocks are built. This is modernization…Remove this old world, all of it, and build new modern cities like European cities. We say No. We are a people with a heritage that is 7000, 8000 years old and this heritage is very important that we preserve it because it is a human heritage as well as an aesthetics heritage.

This move to modernize was so strong that in the 1960s the Syrian government hired the French urban planner Michel Echochard who worked on and in Damascus during the Mandate to draw up plans on how to modernize the city.[32] His ideas on urban planning were in circulation since the time of the French. Some of his recommendations were eventually implemented in the 1970s and 1980s. These included the building of highways that crisscrossed the city and encircled the Old City isolating it from its surroundings. One of his controversial recommendations was the destruction of the area between the Umayyad Mosque and al-Azem Palace a neighborhood known as Al-Hamrawi and turning it into a parking lot, a proposal the UNESCO committee found baffling as did many Syrians. This caused a huge public uproar and was later rescinded. It was during this time that the danger facing the Old City became acknowledged and led to a grassroots movement consisting mainly of residents, scholars, historians, artists, and

[32] For more on the role of Echochard in the urbanization of Damascus see Abdulac (1982).

writers to coordinate effort to save the Old City from demolition in the name of modernization. Their efforts led to adding Damascus to the UNESCO's World Heritage List in 1979 and passing legislation to protect the Old City in 1983.

However, it was a challenging situation to call for the protection of the Old City that many saw as a decaying area and standing in the way of real progress. In 1969 Al-Rihawi who had worked in the Antiquities Department during the French Mandate had to defend his position to preserve the Old City:

> I don't want the reader to understand my concern for the protection of Old Damascus and my opposition to those who want to modernize it that I want it to remain in this state of neglect, banned from all development and rehabilitation. I want it to have its share of all the services necessary for the existence of its population on the condition that this does not lead to its eradication or effect its historical appearance and original nature.
>
> (Al-Rihawi 1969:86)

Wajh Ḥadarī

In 2001 the attitude shifted towards people who lived and worked in the Old City and their role in preventing the actual preservation of the history of the intramural city. As government attempts to put a "*wajh ḥadarī,"* (civilized face) to counterattack discourse by American and European officials that it should catch up with the rest of the world by showcasing the civilization of historical Syria. This discourse was behind the

restoration of Suq Hamidiyah in 2002, to sanitize the Old City for tourists and encourage investment in the historic city

According to one of the architects who worked on the project: "the suq is an important tourist site in Damascus" and was in need of restoration. The project called for the upgrading of the antiquated infrastructure but also to restore the "damage" done by the shopkeepers. According to the official discourse, shopkeepers were in violation; they had expanded their stores beyond their legal boundaries and encroached on the public areas of the suq. This rendered the suq congested without shoppers forced to the narrow path between the shops. Not only was this impacting the aesthetics of the suq, but reflected unmodern practices that the government hurt the public image of the city. The architect explained:

> What was happening before is part of the mentality. Shops were expanding because of inheritance problems and columns were hidden. We want the original architecture…I don't understand why there is no taste, beauty utility, the built environment affects people. If you have organization and order people start to think in this direction. If you leave them in chaos you encourage this way of life. The suq did not start off with chaos it had architectural basics. We allowed them freedom of expression but within their boundaries.

When I pointed out that this sounds similar to what orientalists have written on the Middle Eastern bazaars and people's mentality. He responded by telling me that I was too critical of orientalists, they had a right to say this. Shopkeepers should have

stayed within their own space. He went on to explain how much disorganized the suq had become and said "I am sticking to the principle. Why did they [the shopkeepers] assume they had the right to extend outside their boundaries? This affects the mentality of people…think about the good of the country."

The city that needs to be preserved and protected consisted of the built environment that was decaying because of the people who live and work there. This is further illustrated by the proceedings of the Friends of Damascus conference held in 1992 entitled *The Preservation of the Old city is a National Responsibility*. One of the questions put to the panelist was "Who are the enemies of Old Damascus?" Answer: "There is a consensus that on the one hand they are the owners of the harmful industries and on the other, those who deserted their homes and hope that they will decay and crumble so they can obtain permission from the officials for demolishing them and construct commercial buildings in their place" (Jamayat As-Diqa' 1992:8).

The discourse that was predominate during the colonial period remained pertinent for many officials working on the preservation of the Old city. This situation is described by David Scott who wrote about the postcolonial in general when he writes "with the new hegemony of a neoliberal globalization, it is no longer clear what "overcoming" western power actually means…there is now a fundamental crisis in the Third World in which the very coherence of the secular-modern project-with its assurance of progressive social-economic development…can no longer be taken for granted" (Scott 1999:14-15).

What is occurring in this context can be termed "auto-orientalism" to use the term Mazzarella employs to talk about the "use of globally recognized signifiers of Indian

"tradition" to facilitate the aspirational consumption, by Indians, of a culturally marked self." (Mazzarella 2003:138). But we see it here used to justify projects that are producing new spaces for global consumption. In Damascus we can see the sanitization of the Old City for tourists but what is also occurring is an "essentialist discourse" (Al-Azmeh 1993:42) which I will argue in Chapter Five is a tactical approach to dealing with the west.

Conclusion

I have argued in the Syrian context modernity discourses are a strategy, a "tactical practice" for survival. The modernity ushered in by the Ottomans was in part an attempt to prevent the encroachment of European nations on their territories in the east. By altering the cityscape building arcades, boulevards, and other urban renewal projects, they were demonstrating to European powers that, they too, are modern entities as well. Modernization projects as implemented by the Ottomans sought to eliminate the difference so that western interference to help them modernize became unnecessary. On the other hand, modernization projects reorganized social life and made it easier for the Ottomans to exert control over their Arab subjects.

The current Syrian regime is in a similar predicament vis-à-vis the west. It is attempting to counterattack accusations by Western countries especially America that claim the government of Syria is "out of touch" and should "catch up" with the rest of the world. These accusations have serious ramifications in the current geopolitical climate. Thus historic preservation as a modernization practice offers a solution on several layers

to combat these accusations. First, it creates a sanitized space for tourists that encourage people flow between the West and Syria. Tourism makes Syria less isolated and more familiar to other countries. It also highlights what officials call the wajh hadarī of Syria, thereby ensuring the nation's status in world history. Second, the process of preservation is creating new spaces with modern spatial practices that are being negotiated by local inhabitants. Thus we see the layer of interaction between the West and Syria, as well as the internal dynamics and the official discourse and local practices in the project of modernity.

The Old City is at the forefront of debates of modernity and tradition as well as the focus of modernization process because of its history that can be manipulated to suit the demands of the present. When the Syrians were fighting the French colonists they clung to their courtyard houses and winding alleys as a testament to their Syrian national identity. However, currently the Old City has to be more welcoming to tourists and foreign investors. The built environment is simultaneously a testament of the achievements of the past and their shortcomings. By declaring the Old City as a heritage site and setting forth laws for its protection and preservation this is an attempt to salvage the glorious past for the future.

The Old City continues to be inhabited by people who represented a wide section of the Syrian population. Not all shwām families moved out and many of those who moved in from the rural areas eventually purchased houses in the Old City or in turn moved to the new city. I will discuss this in Chapter Four. The Old City is not mainly inhabited by people who are either poor and cannot live elsewhere or transient renters.

Yet it is this discourse that it is not populated by people who really care about it or can do something about improving the conditions there that propel historic preservation projects. In Chapter Three I will discuss how the residents of an intramural neighborhood care about the Old City through their spatial practices.

Chapter Three: "Nothing has Changed:" Continuity of Place

This chapter explores the impact of designating the Old City as a heritage site on long-term residents, mostly locals, of the intramural neighborhood, Haret Hanania. Through this exploration I illustrate how they have maintained a connection to place through their spatial practices that continued with the recent transformations. The laws protecting and preserving the intramural city from demolition included no provisions for the lifestyle that existed in the neighborhoods but inadvertently had contributed to its continuity. In Haret Hanania many of the inhabitants are able to benefit from this change, which is leading to the gentrification of the neighborhood, and at the same they are able to maintain their connection to and sense of community in the ḥārah. I have chosen this ḥārah because it exemplifies what I call a 'mixed area' where residential alleys and tourist establishments and sites co-exist. It is also the neighborhood where I have lived in 2003-2004. Most of the literature on gentrification and urban renewal is replete with narratives of rupture, displacement, and conflict (Davila 2004; Davis 1990; Hartigan 1999; Smith 1996). Urban change can be disruptive and detrimental to long-term inhabitants however it can also creates stability and continuity.

The study of place relates to the experiences of living in places (Rodman 2003:205). Places have narratives in their own right with different meanings and discourses. In Haret Hanania I highlight the different ṭabaqāt of meanings in space use as well as in the differences among the locals and between them and the cosmopolitans in

the neighborhood. There are several modernities being articulated in this space by different social actors who have divergent views on history, preservation, and the role of one other in the future of the ḥārah.

At times these discourses converge and I want to emphasize this in my work since anthropology has become rather engrossed with places as sites of contestation and violence (Feld and Basso 1996:5). Such a focus neglects the continuity a place can offer. What is noticeable in my work were the ways in which many people who lived and worked in Haret Hanania did not see the transformations in the physical structure as threatening to their way of life. Much of this continuity has to do with their spatial practices that continue to bridge that past and the present. As Lefebvre observed that spatial practices, especially daily routines, ensure continuity and some degree of cohesion and this is apparent in the Old City (Lefebvre 1991:38).

Space remains an abstract entity until it assumes significance through the spatial practices of people. Lefebvre's spatial practices, representations of space, and spaces of representation are an approach to study the cultural meanings of space (1991:33). Social, economic, and political aspects of a society converge to produce space (Low 1996b:861). The embodiment of this physical space with meaning and significance makes it place. Thus, space becomes place through the meanings and values that people infuse onto space. The inhabitants of Haret Hanania had limited access to the production of space due to the constraints imposed upon them by the government's preservation laws as well as their own financial limitations. However, they were actively engaged in creating a meaningful place.

"Nothing Has Changed"

Abu George and Abu Sami were born, raised, and still worked in Haret Hanania.[33] A few years ago Abu George had moved to another intramural neighborhood but he still came to his little shop in the ḥārah everyday. Both men were in their late 70s, and both insisted they will only leave the ḥārah when they die. This was made more significant since they were originally shwām and not many of them remained in the Old City. Abu Sami was proud of the fact he lived in the same house as his parents and grandparents.[34] His son was ready to get married but he wanted to live outside the ḥārah in a ṭābiq instead of his family's bayt ʻarabī. The son, like many of the young people in the Old City, wanted a modern dwelling especially with a place to park his car in front of his home.

Abu Sami and Abu George told me that the ḥārah had existed *min zamān*, (a long time ago), a catchall phrase for something that had happened beyond a person's living memory. When I pressed Abu George for a date he said "at least 2 thousand years ago." By this he was referencing the church in the neighborhood which according to local lore was built over the house of Ananias where Paul became a follower of Christ. However, the ḥārah might be a little older than 2000 years.

[33] Abu means father of. In Arabic culture once the first son is born both parents are no longer known by their given name but become Abu and Um (mother of) their son. It is the most common and polite form of addressing older married men and women who have a son.
[34] I will discuss Abu Sami's house in more detail in Chapter Five.

It is near impossible to reconstruct a history of the individual neighborhoods in the intramural city.[35] Some dates and events can be gleaned from the history of the different ethnic and religious groups in Damascus that congregated in one quarter or other.[36] Haret Hanania was not included in the Aramaean city, but by the time the Romans occupied Damascus the city had expanded and included the eastern section within the confines of the wall. There were some reports that the Nabataeans, an Arab tribe from south of present day Jordan, had settled the eastern part of the Old City in 87 BC (Burns 2005:44) and they might have been the first inhabitants of Haret Hanania. The name Hanania comes from the Arabic name for Ananias and it probably became popular once a commemorative structure was built to mark the site of Paul's conversion though when this happened was not clear.

More recent changes have occurred in the neighborhood over the past several decades that include the new church building, the transformation of neighborhood shops along the street selling groceries and food into souvenir shops, the disappearance of textile weaving workshops, the conversion of some houses into stores and more recently restaurants. I assumed Abu Sami and Abu George had not only seen the transformations the neighborhood had undergone over the course of their lives, but they would be able to

[35] There are several histories that explore the extramural neighborhoods because it is easier to chronicle their development since they were established more recently in the past one thousand years, such as the Suq Sarujeh (Moaz 1998) and the Al-Midan (Marino 2000).

[36] Christians traditionally occupied the eastern part of the city though there is historical evidence that they also lived in Qaimariyah. Perhaps it is only around the Umayyad Mosque that housed a Muslim population and Sunni at that since the Shiites congregated around their shrines in Al-Amin St. Jews traditionally lived east of Al-Amin St in the southeastern part of the city. Again there is not much research on the development of ethnic and sectarian neighborhoods in Damascus. For a general overview of the development of ethnic quarters in historic Middle Eastern cities see Greenshields (1980).

tell me about them. I thought I would begin by asking Abu Sami whom I saw more frequently. Later I planned to ask the same of Abu George and compare their narratives.

After several months of living in the ḥārah I became proficient in the routine of different people living there including Abu Sami's. I knew when stores opened and whom I could find there at different times throughout the day. I also knew when neighbors opened their front doors in the morning, started washing the courtyard, began cooking, and when was a good time to go visit, not during cleaning, lunch, siesta, nor when children were doing homework. As I became proficient in my neighbors' daily routine, they also learned mine. I used to joke to my fellow researcher friends that if I ever had amnesia I would not worry because even those in my neighborhood whom I did not have contact with would be able to reconstruct my daily routine.

I knew when Abu Sami sat outside his store in the morning and when a game of backgammon started with his friends, who were most of the time other shopkeepers in the ḥārah. When Abu Sami was watching or playing a game of backgammon he remained oblivious to everything else around him. I knew that Abu George did not come to his shop until 11 am and stayed there until 2 pm. After lunch he returned at 5 pm and stayed until 7 pm. It was best to talk to him in the afternoon when it was less likely he would be busy with his friends who also knew when to come to visit with him.

I had chosen a nice warm spring morning to talk with Abu Sami sitting outside his store before the backgammon game started. I began by asking him what had changed in the ḥārah. "Ma taghyr shi", he replied ("Nothing has changed"), rather abruptly and with a wave of his hand dismissed me and the questions. I tried a variation of the question

"What is new in the neighborhood since you were little boy?" He replied: "Nothing. Same people and same buildings. Nothing has changed even Abu Hani is still here." He pointed to the man sitting next to him listening to us and laughed. Abu Hani nodded in agreement, "Everything is the same."

Abu Hani, though much younger than Abu Sami, was also born, raised, and still lived in the same ḥārah with his wife and children, but his family was not originally shwām. When Abu Sami was very adamant about "nothing has changed," I felt uncomfortable pushing him further even as I ran my eyes up and down the alley mentally listing changes that I had witnessed since moving to Haret Hanania a few months ago. I thought Abu George would be more forthcoming. "Nothing has changed," though less adamant than Abu Sami, was his reply. I thought the old men of Haret Hanania did not want to talk to me; they could be temperamental as I had seen with Abu Sami on numerous occasions. So I approached one of the young men I met in the ḥārah, Abed.

He was one of the first young men I met shortly after moving to the neighborhood. He was generous with his smiles as I walked past his little store to the alley where I lived. He was young, in his early 20s and still lived in the house he was born in with his parents, grandmother, siblings one of whom was married with a child. He was a shāmī, originally from another quarter outside the Old City. Abed, like Abu Sami and Abu George assured me nothing had changed in the neighborhood during his twenty odd years. "As appearance nothing has changed. It is all the same." Although he initially said, "There are no strangers in the ḥārah," he later added that many people have

moved out. However, he did not see the ones who moved in as strangers or as not belonging to the ḥārah.

As I tried to get to the real story of change in Haret Hanania, I kept wondering if I would ever win the trust of the people in the ḥārah and have tell me their true opinions about the transformations in the alleys and street, I realized they just had. There was change in the landscape of Haret Hanania. No one was going to deny the existence of one of the first restaurants in the Old City, Le Piano Bar which opened in 1992, or a few years later the grand opening of Casablanca.[37] Even while I was living in the ḥārah a third house was being converted into a restaurant, or according to some a hotel.[38]

However, these new establishments were not necessarily seen as transforming the neighborhood. Rather what I learned from Abu Sami, Abu George, Abed, as well as, others I had talked to there was a degree of continuity between how things were before and now that makes "nothing has changed" ring true. Instead of looking for change I shifted my focus to continuity and found the key resided in the daily routines and practices of people that they were able to still maintain. The restaurants, new people moving in, and tourist sites had not disrupted their daily spatial practices nor dislodged their sense of community. It is through these ordinary every day practices (De Certeau 1988) that the residents of Haret Hanania, both young and old, were still able to construct meaning in the ḥārah and connect their past with their present.

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[37] For more information on this restaurant see Salamandra (2004).

[38] Many of these projects remain clouded in mystery until they are ready for business. Owners tend not to tell what their end project will be. In this project there were problems and it was stopped by the government for violations. But it was sold to another investor who wanted to continue with the project a restaurant or hotel.

Spatial Practices and Continuity

This continuity, as stated earlier, was the result of the protection laws as well as spatial practices specific to the built environment of the Old City and the ḥārah. The built environment especially the courtyard houses can not be demolished, and the alleys and streets can not be widened. Traffic in these neighborhoods remained for the most part pedestrian. Although the streets allowed for a car to pass through they usually were not able to accommodate parking for cars. Nonetheless some people parked their cars on the street closing at times the alley that led to homes.

Parking cars had become a source of contention among residents. The streets connected the different neighborhoods and quarters with one another in the Old City and beyond. As a result of this physical layout of the ḥārah to get anywhere from any house in the alley one had to walk through the street and sometimes as far as Bab Sharqi or Touma to catch a bus or taxi to any where outside the Old City. It was difficult to escape people; they were neighbors, the local grocer, the shopkeepers, and etc. whom one saw every day whenever one left the house. Hence, the winding alleys and the courtyard called for different spatial practices that some described as unmodern and old fashion but others said produced community and solidarity. It was possible to keep distance from other people, but it got difficult when one shared a wall, roofs, and entrance to the home, as well as the alley.

When I first moved into my room in Haret Hanania, my landlady told me that I could decide how much I wanted to be involved with them. She noted that I could keep to myself and my room if I wanted or I could become part of her family. She seemed to

be sure that I would prefer the later. It was assumed that if I wanted to live in the Old City than I was looking for this form of sociability. It was one of the characteristics of the Old City that lifestyles and social relations were still "traditional" an indication that there is more emphasis on doing what was proper towards neighbors and relatives based on local practices, rather than individual preferences. These social practices included visits, direct human contact for just about any reason, if only to check up on people and maintain contact. In the Old City people can drop by unannounced and stay as long as they liked.

This lifestyle where social relations were important and emphasized was considered one of the unique characteristics of living in the Old City. To become modern was to develop distance from your neighbors and even your extended family. It was also a more formal interaction with people where one would call to come visit and not just appear at the front door. One of my neighbors Nora expressed surprise at how her uncles who lived in a new neighborhood, and therefore were considered modern, came to visit her. It was usually during the holidays when relatives and friends traditionally visited one another. In her experience her modern uncles did not engage with traditional social obligations towards relatives, and she was astonished when they did.

This practice also marks locals from cosmopolitans. Locals are more vested in social relations and maintain connections with relatives and friends on a more intensive scale than cosmopolitans. Fiona was a European married to a Syrian and lived in the Old City. Her husband, a shāmī, decided to move back to a bayt ʿarabī after having lived in an apartment in a new neighborhood. She told me she was "not in constant contact with

the neighbors" because she did not want them meddling in her affairs. Her worry was that the neighbors would want to come and visit at all times when she had to work. She also wanted her privacy. Fiona and her husband as cosmopolitans distinguished themselves by not engaging in social practices as the locals did. She lived in the Old City but she kept her relations with her neighbors at a superficial level.

Nora on the other hand, would have her neighbors, who had become her friends, come over at all hours to drink coffee, watch TV, or just visit. They also came to do different things like putting on nail polish, waxing, and styling hair which would be considered private activities by cosmopolitans to be done within the confines of one's own home instead of someone else's. Her neighbors would borrow her clothes. They would send their children to fetch a shirt or a skirt. They would help Nora cook and if she was out of onions or garlic, her neighbor would send her child to get some for Nora.

Sociability is one of the main characteristics of the Old City and entails the intensification of social relations. Social relations in the intramural and historic neighborhood were different than in the newer neighborhoods. Such social practices were labeled as unmodern by some Syrians because they were incompatible with modern practices like living in a ṭābiq. In unmodern practices the individual was beholden to a higher power when deciding to do something. An individual who was unmodern did things according to what was considered proper. My landlady who had rented to Syrians and non-Syrians in the past knew that people came to live in the Old City for a variety of reasons such as the cheap rent, the historic ambience, but also for the social relations.

My landlady asked me several times to share in their meals and within a week of moving in, she invited me to a dinner party held by one of her cousins.

This sociability is considered part of life in the ḥārah but many people who profess to be modern look upon it as backward and old-fashion. The build environment is assumed by some to contribute to his level of sociability. Nadia Khost talked about *'lab kabrīt* (matchboxes) in her description of apartment buildings that do not allow for warm social relations as in the bayt'arabī. I lived in the room on the roof of the house at the end of the cul-de-sac. There was only one entrance to the alley which was lined with houses on both sides. To get to my room I had to come through the front door, the only entrance to the house. This opened to a corridor that included my landlady's bathroom and kitchen. It ended with the door to her rooms, opposite of which the stairs led to the upper levels. The stairs passed by the rooms on the second level shared by two other tenants. I could not avoid the other tenants, my landlady, and neighbors whenever I entered or left the house. At the very least I had to greet them if I did not want to stop and visit. It would have been very rude to just walk by without saying anything.

Extension of the House

Being constantly among people even though I had my own room took some adjustment until I discovered the unique rhythm to the daily life in the ḥārah. The extension of the house into the alleys and streets is based on a Christian neighborhood where women might be more visible than Muslim women outside the home. Lefebvre introduced "rhythmanalysis" when talking about "specific qualities of Mediterranean

cities" (Lefebvre 1996:228). This is found in the "urban space, that is the public space, becomes the site of a vast scene-setting where are shown and deployed all those relations with their rhythms" (236). Lefebvre was interested in spaces of resistance and struggle but these same spaces can also be the sites of continuum or stability in the face of change by this rhythm of daily life.

It was easy to tell what time of day it was by the people in the street. In the early morning there were the school children in their blue or gray uniforms heading to school. Later in the morning came the housewives going shopping either to the shops in the ḥārah or beyond. Around the same time the street vendors selling foodstuff or fuel come to the neighborhood. The vendors that sold contraband cigarettes or bought scrap metal usually came in the afternoon. In the afternoon children were playing in the streets and alleys. As evening approached men were sitting or standing in the street. What distinguished the Old City from the other neighborhoods in Damascus was the constant contact with people. Either in the house or in the streets and alleys, people as much as buildings were part of the cityscape.

The vendors were an important part of the cityscape of the ḥārah not only because they sold essential goods but because they behaved as though they were from the neighborhood. The man selling cooking gas canisters pushed his heavy load in a cart, rapping on the metal cylinders with a metal wrench announcing his presence for housewives to check their stoves and decide if they need to call for him. In winter it was the *māzout* (diesel fuel) vendor squeezing his "Harpo" horn. From the sound of the metal wrench and "Harpo" horn you could tell which was which. There were also vendors

selling seasonal foods. In summer they sold fava beans and peas for housewives to store for the winter. Since in many instances cars could not reach homes these vendors were important for women because they brought to the doorstep boxes of vegetables for storage or heavy loads like watermelon and gas canisters. They also sold herbs and vegetables, like the old man who wheeled his bicycles with bags of parsley, radishes, tarragon, and cilantro. The vendors sang out their fruit or vegetable.[39]

These vendors were also considered unmodern ways of buying. The fuel vendors were considered noisy and they were prohibited in some of the modern upper-class neighborhoods in Damascus. Furthermore, buying from a street vendor was looked down upon by cosmopolitans who could usually telephone their orders to their grocer. It became a marker of class not to be seen carrying groceries, the mundane stuff of everyday life in and out of the front door of their homes. However, even in the ḥārah there were some women who did not go shopping and it was their husbands or male relatives who shopped for them.[40] They distinguished themselves from the other women who had to go shopping and who had no one else to do it for them.

The vendors also knew the protocol of selling in the ḥārah. They kept to the street. If they went into an alley they stood at its entrance and called out. Only when a person interested in their merchandise called them do they venture further into the alley and approached houses. Although they were not from the ḥārah they showed their

[39] See Keusseoglou (1990) who bemoaned the vanishing cries of street vendors though they still exist in the Old City.

[40] In addition to be being a marker of class it can also be a marker of religion. I have heard that middle class sunni men do all the shopping for the household. This is part of their religious duty to provide for their families.

respect to the people who live there. They also were being careful not to cause problems and be banned from the neighborhood.

The Baker

Community is created in the neighborhood by the interaction between the residents and the different stores. These stores do not only sell food and other items for the household but they develop strong relations with the residents. The two important establishments to see this in a ḥārah are the baker and the grocer.

Bread is the staple of Syrian cuisine and is present at every meal. Many Syrians like their bread fresh and hot and since bakeries are located in the ḥārah, this is made possible. Bakers begin working at 4 and 5 am and closed around 2 pm. The children in their school uniforms can be seen balancing the big round hot loafs on their hands trying not to drop them as they rush home for breakfast. The bakers also baked meals or pastries for the residents, especially for those who do not have an oven. Take the example of *manaqeesh* a popular breakfast pastry, a mixture of olive oil and thyme on flattened dough. Since the bakery is in the ḥārah the women have the baker make it for them. Children or young adults take the thyme mixture in a bowl to the baker and he spreads the mixture on dough and bakes it. The proximity of the baker to the home allow for this breakfast routine. The children drop off the thyme mixture and return in 20 minutes for the hot pastries. The relationship between the baker and the household becomes intertwined and relationships form. The baker helps the housewife by providing

bread and baking meals she prepares. The baker's oven becomes the housewife's oven, she sends pans of chicken, meat, vegetables to be roasted.

I sometimes would go to get bread for my landlady. If I told the baker it was for Um Tariq he would smile and take out the loaves he had started putting in a bag from a batch that was sitting there and turned to a tray of freshly baked bread. He always asks me to convey his greetings. Um Tariq insists I tell him that I am buying bread for her, because she knows that the baker "will take care of her."

Furthermore, the proximity of the bakers to the houses allowed housewives and children to go out in the alley or street dressed in housecoats or pajamas. This is an example of how the ḥārah becomes an extension of the house and of the distinctive features of life there. The boundaries for the private and public sphere are not delineated by the house; as a matter of fact the courtyard house opens to the alley and to the ḥārah beyond it. Residents negotiate the public and private by deciding when to open doors and go out in their pajamas down the alley into the street to the baker to get bread or run any other errand. They can do this because they feel comfortable and at home in the alley and streets as in their own bayt ʿarabī.

Benjamin's concept of "porosity" which "refers to a lack of clear boundaries between phenomena, a permeation of one thing by another, a merger, for example, old and new, public and private, sacred and profane" (Gilloch 1996:25), explains how the baker and the ḥārah become part of the house. By maintaining the porous boundaries the residents were able to expand their homes into the ḥārah and by the same token decided when to close their doors. Porosity allows for boundaries to exist where needed, they are

flexible boundaries. It became a matter of reading the signs as in "the door is open," I could go visit but if it is closed I had to come back another time. When my landlady told me I had the option of taking part in her family activities she was indicating that there were no clear boundaries. Had I wished not to be part of her family, I would have established a rigid boundary, which I would not have been able to cross had I changed my mind afterwards.

As Benjamin wrote on Naples, another Mediterranean city, "each private attitude or act is permeated by streams of communal life. To exist for the Northern European the most private of affairs, is here,..., a collective matter" (Benjamin 1978:171). This porosity helps explain many spatial practices in the Old City. Although Benjamin used this concept about Naples where he saw the commingling of private and public as "rich barbarism" (Benjamin 1978:163) "the interpenetration of the archaic and the modern, the relationship between the enduring and the fleeting, and the city as a space of disintegration and ruination" (Gilloch 1996:26) it was also a sign of continuity. For Benjamin the traditional life in Naples was a "present-day process of decay" that was neither "ancient society nor a modern one, but an improvisatory culture released, and even nourished, by the city's rapid decay" (Buck-Morss 1999:26-27). Benjamin was talking about a traditional created by the process of modernity, though he does not see it this way. It is the modern's other found in practices that were considered ancient juxtaposed to Benjamin's modern practices. A crisis is averted in these locations because a society does not conform to any ideal of what it means to be modern. The stability is a result of the porosity of the modernity in these places. As a tactical practice, modernity

in Syria never created a sharp rupture between the modern and the premodern. This allowed for porosity to exist, more so than in other places, and a continuum in daily life.

Al-Hourani the Grocer

This commingling of private and public also existed with the grocer. Take for instance the main grocery store in the ḥārah known as George Al-Hourani after the original owner but commonly known as Al-Hourani. The store was more than a shop it was also the nexus of the neighborhood and was used as a reference point since after the church it was the main landmark in the ḥārah. It opened from 8 am until midnight. Like many things in Hanania it was difficult to get a history of the store. For over 10 years the store had been closed over some misunderstanding or other that I could not get clarified. Nonetheless, a few years before I moved into the ḥārah the sons and nephews of the original owner re-opened the store. Although it had been closed for several years the fact it retained the original owner's name signaled continuity. If I had not heard about its closing, I would have assumed it had always been there because of how it figured in people's lives in the ḥārah.

When I first moved into the neighborhood, my landlady told me that if I needed groceries George Al-Hourani was a good place to shop because his prices were *tharefeh*, (not overpriced). When she told me that she used to buy from the current owner's father, I assumed it had always been open. Nonetheless, I found it difficult to go to Al-Hourani because it was in my opinion an old-fashion grocery story which I was not used to shopping at. I could not walk inside and browse the aisles, there were no aisles because

there was no space for them. No more than three people could stand inside and if there happened to be more shoppers they waited outside for someone to leave. Surrounded by shelves of merchandise the shopkeeper stood and gathered things from all over the store for shoppers. I felt uncomfortable with this method of shopping, there were some things I did not know the name for and it was not the way I was accustomed to shopping. For the longest time I shopped at a supermarket outside the old city that was more like a western store with shelves and aisles I could walk up and down.

I eventually saw the inconvenience of doing this since I had to carry bags of grocery a long distance to get home. Yet for many of the people in the ḥārah Al-Hourani was their grocery store. It made shopping convenient because the alleys on which people lived were narrow, women could get their groceries without going far and carrying large loads. It was also creating a community because one had to talk to the shopkeeper. The grocer supposedly knew everyone in the neighborhood.

Women in house clothes with their wallets tucked firmly in their arm pits walked to the store with their slippers flapping on the pavement. They made several trips to Al-Hourani. They dropped their purchase at home and returned for groceries or meat. This was possible to do in the Old City living in a one or two story bayt ʻarabī where the distances were shorter. The process becomes complicated in a ṭābiq where to get to the front entrance of the apartment building might take as long as getting from a bayt ʻarabī to the grocer. If women were in the middle of cooking and they were out of some ingredient or other it was just a short trip away, they could even keep the stove on and the

pot boiling as they stepped out in their housecoats to go to Al-Hourani. Although writing about Morocco, Kapchan describes the predicament of living in a ṭābiq where "dwellers must either descend to the street (in formal street attire) or accommodate themselves to a new interiority." (1996:14)

Children were quick to pick on this behavior. You heard children yelling they were going to Al-Hourani to buy candy, and Al-Hourani would send them home if they came too often or had spent too much money. The parents learned to appreciate this especially when a new candy store opened in the neighborhood, the parents complained that the new owners unlike Al-Hourani did not stop the children from spending too much money. The grocer could discipline children just as the parents. This was also part of the social relations in the Old City where children were disciplined by the neighbors and the parents for the most part approved. In modern behavior only the parents should be responsible for disciplining their children.

The relationship between people living in the ḥārah and Al-Hourani became more commingled for those who had no telephone in their homes, which was becoming less of an issue with the ubiquitous cell phone. Al-Hourani was their pay phone. For the single men in the neighborhood living alone, they bought their sandwiches from Al-Hourani and ate in the store. Furthermore, outside the store was the meeting place for the young men in the neighborhood.

Maktab

Saher was one of the young men in Haret Hanania who spent a lot of time standing outside George Al-Hourani's store, sometimes alone but mostly with his friends, who were also his neighbors. I later discovered that this was not just a random street corner where young men stand; this spot is one of the important *maktab* (office) in the ḥārah. Young men gathered at these strategic spots all over the Old City and beyond.

The name maktab was a fascinating appellation for the neighborhood spots where young men and others hang out. I think the name was given because in the general public's imagination offices were places where people do little work if any at all. This was deemed especially true if it was a government office where employees spend time shuffling papers, making telephone calls, reading the newspaper, doing random activities not associated with office work. The atmosphere in an office was one of leisure while working; hence, it was no surprise that the name applied to hang-out spots, since the maktab in the neighborhood was also a place of idleness.

The neighborhood maktab consisted only of young men from the neighborhood and their friends: there were no outsiders. Since many of these young men lived at home with their families, which sometimes include extended family members as well, it was difficult to bring their friends home to hang out. Many of these young men did not have their own rooms but shared with other family members. It made sense to hang out in the alley. The street corners, then, became again an extension of the home, a commingling of the private and the public and the place where young men could hang out with their friends without encroaching on the privacy of their homes.

I was intrigued by this activity, for it seemed perfectly acceptable by the neighborhood that these young men, sometimes loud, were in the streets at all hours but mainly in the evening and at night. People passed them by and sometimes they greeted one or several of the young men standing there if they happened to be acquainted. However, they mostly just walked by the maktab perhaps secure in the knowledge that it was there and open for business indicated that all was well in the ḥārah.

The maktab was a place where the young men displayed themselves and exhibited their sexual prowess. I began to notice young women during their walks in the evenings usually in groups, always arm in arm, perhaps to show strength and protection in numbers. They would slow down as they pass the maktab, and tried not to make eye contact with the young men but made sure that the young men could "check them out." They set forth their best profiles. During these intense moments the young men became silent sometimes only to burst into laughter after the young women walked by. Other times they hissed or whistled especially if the group of young women was not from their neighborhood and were not known to them. At times the young men even made comments to one another definitely aimed at a captivating young woman. One young man might pretend to be speaking to his friends would say, "Now why didn't you let me wear red today," or any other color the young attractive woman happened to be wearing. Therefore, the maktab became a space where young men and women could interact albeit indirectly in a public location.

Needless to say, Saher's Maktab was the domain of the young men in the neighborhood. Saher walked outside his house and he was with friends that he had

known since childhood. If he got bored at home all he had to do was go to the maktab. The boundary between his house and the alley was blurred. Therefore, it was the place to be if you were young, popular, and of course living in the neighborhood. The maktab was usually open and ready for business in the early evening and stayed open until midnight during the summer but closed much earlier in winter. Saher told me, "Guys do this because they have nothing else to do and they have all this free time so after work they stand and watch and talk and joke to pass the time." Of course he did not go into details about what they talked about. I suspected he did not wanting to divulge secrets of the brotherhood. He tried to convince me that at times it was boring standing there with the same faces, telling the same stories, and hearing the same jokes. He did tell me, however, that without people standing outside their homes, stores, or hanging out in the alleys it would not be a neighborhood. A ḥārah becomes a ḥārah with its people extending their homes into the alleys and that was how the Old City differs from the new city where residents kept to their apartments and homes.

The Church

The church has an interesting history in Haret Hanania. Excavations conducted in 1921 revealed remains of a temple assumed to be Greek. The temple was succeeded by a Christian shrine identified as the Church of the Cross which in turn became a mosque during the reign of Saladin (Sauvaget 1932:10-11).[41] When it became a church again is unknown. It is now a tourist site managed by the Franciscans Brothers of the Province

[41] No one in the ḥāreh seems to know the Church of Hanania by this name.

of the Custody of Terre Santa. According to handout from the Franciscan Church in Bab Touma, in 1800 the brotherhood purchased a small abandoned church that was commonly known as the first house for the spiritual leader of Damascus, Ananias, and it has remained in their possession ever since.

In the early 1970s the old structure of the church was demolished and a new one built in its place with a wall and gate. I will discuss this in Chapter Six. Around the time of the new building in 1974 many of the stores on the street leading from Bab Sharqi to the church converted from groceries into souvenir stores. Before the designation of the shrine as a tourist site these stores sold foodstuff to the residents of the neighborhood. The stores on the street that continues to Bab Touma are still geared towards the ḥārah. This is one instance where the shops on the street are divided between the tourists and the residents. Some of the houses on the street leading to the church converted a room into a store. The church brought new economic opportunities to the residents that they were quick to capitalize upon.

Groups of tourists from all over the world but largely from Europe and the Far East are ushered up the street from Bab Sharqi, where their tour guide bus is parked, amidst the children playing in the street and men sitting outside their shops calling to the tourists to come in "for a cup of tea." The shopkeepers had become adept at guessing where the tourists were from either from the way they look or talk. They would call out phrases in English, French, Italian, or Spanish. The tourists walk under dripping laundry and the smell of cooking wafting from the houses.

The church began as a shrine for tourists. No services took place their regularly. It was sometimes rented out for baptisms or other occasions. It was not the church for Sunday mass or other services. Nonetheless for the residents of Haret Hanania the church was part of their daily lives. The devout crossed themselves whenever they pass by it even if they did so several times a day. They used the courtyard of the church for various activities. Men who bought hot bread from the baker came to the church and spread the hot loaves on the benches in the courtyard to cool before putting them into bags again and taking them home even with tourists present.[42] Many of the stores that lined the street did not have bathrooms; the shopkeepers came to the church to use the public bathrooms. People would visit sitting on the benches in the courtyard. School children came to light a candle before an exam. Some of the shopkeepers met there to catch the morning sun before the tourists came and they became busy. When the church stayed open after hours waiting for a tour group, the news spread up and down the street and shopkeepers stayed open as well. The outside wall of the church served as a bulletin board for the ḥārah. Posters for events and activities were plastered there as well as flyers announcing deaths and the memorial services for them.

The area behind church was once widened to build a parking lot as part of a plan to demolish the houses on the street leading to Bab Sharqi. The proposal was to isolate the tourist site from its surroundings in order to provide an unobstructed view of the church for the tourists walking up from Bab Sharqi. The plan was eventually abandoned

[42] Hot bread would cake if packed into bags and so many people who did not live in the neighborhood would spread the bread to cool and re-bag it to take home.

and now the parking lot is a playground for the children from the neighborhood. But the lot was also a place of contention, because at one point in its history a mosque existed there. Though currently there were no Muslims living in Haret Hanania, several years ago a group of them from outside the neighborhood wanted to erect a mosque on the remains.[43] The residents protested and the government halted the plan. The area behind the church is referred to as *jami'* (mosque).

Restaurants in the *Ḥārah*

Initially I was interested in how the residents of the historic neighborhoods responded to the opening of restaurants and bars. I had heard that some restaurants had encountered resistance from the neighbors during the renovation processes resulting in several lawsuits and complaints by the residents that halted or postponed work on a project. In some cases these obstacles were overcome but not in others. However, what I had found was that these establishments that have opened in Haret Hanania have become part of the neighborhood especially Casablanca. They were physically present but this had not, at least for the time being, translated into a transformation of the neighborhood.

The restaurant owners, as I will discuss in Chapter Five brought services to the neighborhoods. In the case of the owners of Casablanca they daily cleaned the alley leading to their establishment and painted the walls of their neighbors. They improved the street lights and since they remained open until rather late, they kept the alleys well lit and therefore safer. I began to notice these things when I saw Malik, one of the owners,

[43] According to people in the hareh and government officials Hanania had always been a Christian neighborhood.

supervise his workers as they hosed the alley in front of the restaurant. He told me: "I brought services to this neighborhood. I worked hard to bring electricity [street lamps], I hire someone to clean the alley daily, and I bring heads of states to this neighborhood. I increased the price of homes." He was very aware of the positive impact his establishment had on the ḥārah which only served to highlight the neglect these neighborhoods and quarters witnessed because they were not where important people lived or worked. It also illustrated that residents were not averse to change if it was to their benefit though it took them a while to see if this was the case or not. Not all restaurants had been as beneficial to the people living in the neighborhood.

Theoretically for a house to be converted into a restaurant it must receive the approval of all the neighbors. However, what ultimately mattered in this issue was the owner of the restaurant and how well connected he was to officials and authority figures. I heard the story of one restaurant scheduled to open in another ḥārah whose owners instead of seeking permission to open from neighbors, instead spread the message in no uncertain terms that those who were not happy with it "will understand *bi shahata*," (with a slipper), a physical beating. It was likely that this restaurant and the owners would not gain acceptance in the neighborhood.

Malik, a Muslim shāmī living outside the Old City, did have initial resistance to his venture from the neighbors but worked to reduce friction between him and the neighbors. Eventually he became part of the street scene. Some thought he was going to transform the house into a mosque and then some were not sure what a restaurant in the ḥārah meant. Now he sat outside his restaurant greeting everyone who passed by whether

they went into his restaurant or not. He told me "There is a saying 'Greet me well and don't feed me.'" He played backgammon with his neighbors. He stood outside his restaurant with his workers fingering his worry beads and chatting with shopkeepers and residents. Little children called him *ammo* (uncle) and he was invited to baptisms and weddings. When Rania his neighbor got married he sent a huge bouquet of flowers and as she was leaving her home for the church he rolled out the red carpet he reserved for important guests and opened a bottle of champagne in her honor. He went to funerals. Though his neighbors may not afford to dine in his restaurants he kept good relations with them in a strategy to reduce conflict and reinforce the social practices of the shwām. "If I see a young woman coming home from a trip carrying a big suitcase I send one of my workers to help her home…I want to keep alive shwām habits, the love they have for one another, how they help one another in times of need." He was aware of the local practices that were the same for Muslims and Christians and he engaged in them to become part of the ḥārah.

The diners were potential customers for the souvenir shops and entertainment for those who sat in the alley. If someone important was coming to the restaurant the neighbors knew without asking Malik because the alley would be scrubbed cleaner than usual and the red carpet rolled out. The neighbors could sit outside their doors or windows and watch. The next day they would tell the others in Haret Hanania that they greeted the President of Syria himself and gave his wife flowers.

Virgins in the *Ḥārah*

With these tourist establishments becoming prominent in the neighborhood the residents themselves were involved on a smaller scale in preparing their ḥārah for the influx of tourists. For many who lived there they did not have the capital to invest in a restaurant or a hotel nor might they wanted to. But there were other issues in the Old City that need their attention.

It was very dirty in the Old City. I found it disturbing that I had to throw my garbage bags near the church at the entrance to the alley leading to my place. There was no container, I placed the bags which I had to make sure were tied tightly or the cats would get into them, next to the wall. I felt uncomfortable throughout my stay in Haret Hanania throwing garbage on the street especially when my bags were the first out there. The garbage man came several times a night to pick the trash. "Why is there is no container or proper disposal system?" I would ask my Syrian friends. They half-jokingly reply: "We are Syrians this is how things are done here." Later I found that things could be done differently.

One day I was out with my landlady and she was taking me through the alleys so that we could avoid the cars. When cars drive through the streets there was no room for pedestrians. As we approached Bab Touma we passed a massive shrine with a statue of Jesus Christ and another of the Virgin Mary standing side by side in their respective glass boxes. There were unlit candles in a sand tray in front of the statues. I asked about them and she said: "This is something people have done for tourism." I tried to inquire more

from her but she did not have anything else to add. So I approach Um Tamer one of the neighbors who knew more.

Figure 6: Virgin Shrine

According to Um Tamer the Virgins in the ḥārah began to appear five to ten years ago. It all started very suddenly when one family wanted to take back the street corner in front of their house. It was dark and sheltered in these corners and young couple would meet there and in the shadows and do what young couples do when they meet. Though they could be seen no one could distinguish exactly who they were. The family was not excited about lovers' trysts under their nose especially when they had young women in the family whom they did not want to get any ideas. Also the neighbors threw their garbage there and some tradesmen and peddlers who came to the neighborhood selling diesel fuel, Kleenex, or parsley and radishes would relieve themselves in the corner. The stench and the sights right out their front door was getting unbearable. They tried placing signs and potted plants but nothing changed. From their trips to neighboring Lebanon

they saw Virgin Shrines in neighborhoods and brought the idea home.[44] They built the shrine. They got statues of the Virgin Mary planted a few bushes of evergreens or roses and had a tray with sand for candles and incense. Now people stand in these corners in reverence and pray before the Virgin Mary. People passing by cross themselves. Those not religiously inclined would hurry on their way. The smell of candles and incense on Saturdays would perfume the neighborhood. And the idea had spread to all areas of the Bab Touma particularly in the neighborhoods with a predominantly Catholic population.

The greengrocer used to throw her rotting vegetables in the corner outside her shop for the garbage men to pick up. A neighbor decided to turn the space into a Virgin Shrine and I saw the transformation of the garbage corner into a beautiful Shrine, though the statue of Mary looks slightly cross-eyed. This neighbor had received money from relatives who lived outside the Old City but wanted to donate the money for the building of the shrine in the ḥārah. This illustrates that the dichotomy between inhabitants and outsider has many layers. Though some people may not live in the Old City, they did have an attachment to the place. Unlike cosmopolitans, these relatives were not changing from the outside but keeping with the locals' interpretation of place.

The relatives wanted this shrine as part of *nidher*, an oath made to the Virgin Mary. In the mornings or in the evenings the neighbor came to the shrine to clean the melted wax and water the plants. Here we see again the porosity between house and the alley where the shrine is both public and private. Some people walking through the street

[44] Lebanon is considered by many Syrians to be a very modern place, the very west in fact next door. The Lebanese are the epitome of cosmopolitanism according to many Syrians.

would stop to pray and light a candle. It was also for the family who had sponsored it and for the ones who were taking care of it.[45]

The Virgin was the saint of choice for the residents of Bab Touma since the layers of her significance are many. She was the only saint that all sects in Syria could agree upon. Christians in all their denominations revere her. In the Arab world the Virgin did not just belong to Christian. She was as much cherished in Islam, with both sects Sunnis and Shiites. She is the only woman named in the Koran. She is also popular with other sects in Syria such as the Alawis. In a country where religious sentiment runs high, the Virgin Mary can elicit respect no couple would dare hold hands before the Virgin Mary. Hence, families in the neighborhood were able to enforce proper social behavior, clean up and beautify their neighborhoods and most importantly reclaim the space near their front door. Furthermore, locals partook in the endeavor to improve tourism in their neighborhoods by initiating efforts to keep the alleys and streets clean.

Conclusion

The "*ma taghyr shi"* (nothing has changed) can only be expressed by the residents of the Haret Hanania since they see the transformation of the ḥārah a continuation of life there. Hannerz writes that "change is made of other people's continuities" (1996:25). It is the continuities of the residents of Haret Hanania that would eventually define the change in the neighborhood. By establishing flexible and porous

[45] A neighbor of mine was trying to drum up support for building a shrine to the entrance of our alley where people threw their garbage and parked cars making an already narrow lane impossible to walk through. The building of shrines is either an individual or collective effort. I left Damascus with the effort not yet realized.

borders, residents in Haret Hanania are able to negotiate the changes while maintaining their spatial practices. Hence, they maintained continuity as the transformations took place. Where modernity can introduce rigid boundaries with the introduction of timeless and unyielding tradition as its other, continuity becomes impossible. People can maintain continuity through their own definition of what it means to be modern. They may be labeled as unmodern and some may see themselves as such but the residents of Haret Hanania are engaged with what it means, at least for them, to be modern.

Newcomers to the neighborhood confirm to this behavior and also establish flexible borders. Although Malik initially met resistance with the residents, he was able to become part of the neighborhood. Although the Franciscans rebuilt the church as a tourist site it retained in spite of the wall and gates flexible and porous boundaries. Residents are able use the space of the church as part of their daily routine. As we will see in subsequent chapters this flexibility is becoming under scrutiny with the historic preservation programs because it is considered unmodern and incompatible with the future vision for the historic city.

Chapter Four: "Who Has no History, Has no Future:[46]" Preserving Whose Old City

In this chapter I explore how the emergence of the intramural district as the Old City created new discourses about its current inhabitants and their role in the future of the city. I build on Chapter Two which depicted the historical evolution of the Old City through a discourse of modernity and tradition that began with the Ottomans, remained during the French colonial period and continued under Syrian independence. I contrast the practices of residents that I have described in Chapter Three with the discourses surrounding locals. Modernization is seen in the practices of the residents as they made their courtyard houses comfortable. This process was viewed as threatening to the unique built environment of the Old City. In the following pages I resume with the discourse of modernity and tradition to demonstrate how representations of space and place have extended to people who live there.

When the Old City emerged as a heritage and historic site at the end of the 20th century, it becomes a symbol of modernity (Flores 2002). To retain this heritage and history required preservation initiatives but those who could ultimately undertake these projects were selected based on their relationship to the Old City. Cosmopolitans who saw the Old City as a heritage site considered themselves to be more qualified over the locals to undertake historic preservation projects.

[46] This is the gloss of an Arab saying *ili malu qadeem, malu jaded* that literally means "who has no old, has no new" which at times was mentioned in the context of reasons for preserving the Old City.

It is difficult to talk about class in the Old City, or to divide shwām and non-Damascenes into social tiers when talking about the impact of historic preservation. Although class is an important marker of identity, it is not as important when it comes to beliefs surrounding the historic preservation of the Old City. The transformation is not only in the cityscape but in how people relate to the intramural neighborhoods and the historic built environment. It is not only a question of whom currently lives there or not, but how they articulate their concept of modernity onto the cityscape of the Old City.

Historic preservation is part of the process of modernity which requires the creation of the other. In their discourses of heritage, cosmopolitans have reconstructed the other in the locals that live in the Old City. Since I consider modernity as a tactical practice undertaken at different phases to meet external challenges, so is the creation of the other. The current preservation of the Old City is a new chapter in the modernization of space and place in Damascus.

I use "unmodern" rather than tradition to talk about modernity's "other." Tradition is not opposed to modernity but rather its creation. The unmodern on the other hand does not fit with the modernization process and has to be eliminated altogether if modernity is to proceed. Tradition is currently viewed as something to be preserved and it is in the built environment and not in people's practices. I will demonstrate that the locals have become illustrative of poverty and backwardness while the historic built environment attained some respectability as a heritage site. In today's current geopolitical realities, unmodern is a malady. I explain this using the concepts of "purity" and "pollution" as set forth by Mary Douglas where dirt is seen as disorder that has to be

eliminated or controlled (Douglas 1966:12). The ordering in the Old City is taking place through the historical preservation projects as implemented by the cosmopolitans where they attempt to define the role of the locals in the city. However, the locals have their own interpretation of order and dirt and negotiate their own position in the Old City.

First Impressions

Once the Old City became the depository of history and heritage its role as a living thriving urban center changed dramatically. The daily life found in the quarters and neighborhoods conflicted with the official representation of a historic city and heritage site fixed in time and space. Preservation requires permanence (Holleran 1998) that is undermined by the activities of the living. As long as the Old City was considered the poor squatter area of Damascus it was home and work for the locals that lived there. However, once it became historic and heritage site, the locals began to be marginalized. This led to various representations of the Old City implicating the locals as backward and contributing to the decline of the heritage site there.

In 2001 upon my first trip to Damascus for fieldwork, I sought out two friends, Linda and Kyle, who had been living there for over a year. Both American and whom I had known in the States, they were my first guides in navigating the new environment, and I asked them about living in the Old City. They immediately and simultaneously said: "Don't." Since they had lived briefly in the Old City when they first arrived in Syria before moving to apartments in the newer neighborhoods of Damascus I felt they had something to impart on the matter. I should mention briefly that many international

students, researchers, and travelers live in the Old City because of the cheap rent, and to experience life in a historic city.[47] Kyle and Linda carefully explained to me how unhappy and uncomfortable I would be, and they shared their own experiences-as well as those of other expatriates they knew-to prove their point.

First they explained that there were no apartments in the Old City. I would have to rent a room, or rooms, in a house where I would share the amenities with the owner's family or other tenants. I would have no privacy since the rooms in a courtyard house are not connected, I would have to go outside one room into the courtyard to enter another. I would have to go through the courtyard for the bathroom and kitchen, which might be alright in the summer but not in the cold winter. They also told me of "crazy" families in the Old City that rent out rooms to foreigners and monitor their every movement.

Many of us who lived in Damascus that year had at least one landlord or landlady story to tell, yet the ones in the Old City for some reason have become more vivid. I think this had to do with the nature of the courtyard house that made it easier for property owners to monitor tenants. Owners therefore could exercise more control over movements and decide who was allowed to visit.

The rooms in a courtyard house are extremely cold in winter and hot in summer and a heater or fan is never enough to assuage the extreme weather conditions. Linda caught a terrible cold that led her and Kyle to move in the fall before the winter started. They also graphically told me about the rats and cockroaches that populated the alleys

[47] The neighborhoods in the Old City have capitalized on the steady income brought in by internationals. Most of the leasing is done through word of mouth, ads and flyers that owners put up in strategic places like backpacker hotels, Arabic language institutes, etc.

and the houses, not to mention the filth, the garbage in the streets, the stench from pipes and open sewers, the dust, and soot in winter from the diesel fueled heaters. But the one determining factor that convinced me I should not live in the Old City that trip was when Linda and Kyle described lead poisoning from the old water pipes and how it could turn hair green, though it did not happen to them, they knew someone it did. They offered enough anecdotes and tales that left me wondering why anyone would want to live there in the first place. I decided I could commute to my field site and found an apartment in the modern neighborhoods of Sha'alan during my fieldwork in 2001-2002.

In their depictions of the Old City my two friends had not differed greatly from the earlier European travelers to Syria who bemoaned the glorious past amidst the decaying present. The belief has remained through the past century that the Old City is a place in ruins, the beauty of life in a courtyard house is marred by the filth and squalor found there. Kyle and Linda did not only talk like many expatriates that found Old City dirty and cold but like many Syrians, who had an even a more negative image of the Old City, some without ever having gone there. Therefore the discourse of some Syrians surrounding the Old City corresponds to the depictions of Western travelers both past and present in an interesting twist of "auto-orientalism."

Some of the Syrians I met following my conversation with Kyle and Linda repeated much of the same things. The mere suggestion that I was thinking of living in the Old City left many Syrians smiling benignly at me and shaking their heads in disbelief. They explained patiently how people were more conservative in the Old City than in other parts of Damascus. As an American and a woman, they explained to me, I

would surely want freedom that I would not find in the historic cities. They also stressed that it did not really matter whether I lived in the Christian or Muslim neighborhoods, since people who lived in the Old City are unmodern regardless of sect. They also added it was dirty and cold in the winter and there were rats and cockroaches.

What emerges from this discourse is the ways in which the Old City was not a place for comfortable modern living, especially for an American. It remains unmodern not only in terms of the condition of the built environment but also in the landlords behavior. Kyle and Linda like many Syrians and non-Syrians, maintain the impression that the Old City is inhabitable. Rooms are not in the best condition for leasing because property owners are in need of the extra income to begin with or they would not bother renting. In some cases the rent is the only income for a family which means the rooms would not be in the best condition.

In my own experiences while searching for a place to stay in the Old City I found many examples to substantiate these reports. Owners of nice rooms did not need to rent and deal with tenants. The belief remains that dealing with tenants is not something that you would want to do, ideally. Furthermore, many of the rooms found for lease in the Old City are rented to students, either Syrian or non-Syrian, or soldiers who in either case are not permanent residents, thus there is no need to maintain the rooms and keep them in the best condition.

When I returned in 2003 with more confidence and a better knowledge of Damascus, I moved into the Old City, to a room that was converted into an efficiency with its own kitchenette and bathroom. Based on my experience these were rather rare to

find for lease in the Old City. However, the relative comfort was not apparent to me when I arrived at the end of October, a marked difference than when I arrived two years earlier in Mid September. Then it was still warm. But in October it was getting cold. When I moved into my new apartment a few days after my second arrival in Damascus I had written in my journal:

> I hate it [Old City] and this is my first night. It is cold and dirty. How is this different from other parts of Damascus??? Well for one you have to walk to get to the house through narrow winding alleys. My place is in a cul-de-sac and so there is only one way in. But leaving the cul-de-sac there were several alleys. … I just hate it since it exacerbates my claustrophobia. It is also quiet at times, eerily so, and I just don't like it.

When I left a year later, I did so kicking and screaming, but the adjustment period to life in a courtyard house as opposed to an apartment was difficult in the first few months. Having to deal with the cold and heat posed serious challenges and a few days later things have not changed much:

> So here I am in the Old City and it is getting colder. Although my room is warm I still feel cold and imagine this is how it will remain until the spring thaws the cold lodged in my bones. All the homes have their *sobias*[48] and you can tell when they are on because the alleys smell of

[48] These are diesel heating stoves the most common heating apparatus in Syria. The fuel is very smelly and does not burn clean but it is cheaper than electricity or gas. Some of the better off residents have ac/heat units but since they run on electricity and can be expensive the still preferred choice for keeping warm is sobia.

> diesel fuel and sometimes when one is smoking soot flies all around and lands on you … Now I know why the Old City is not winter friendly, it is always dark and damp. The alleys are not well kept and are almost always muddy or filled with running water. You hear the water trickle everywhere, in the pipes and drains. Drains from the roof pour onto the pavement in front of houses.

These were some of the realities of living in an urban area that is old with an antiquated infrastructure. Since the majority of the population is perceived as poor and rural immigrants with little to no political clout, not many services were offered to them by the government.[49] However, this is now changing with the historic preservation projects. Furthermore, the discomforts that I have experienced were the very reasons that led many shwām to leave the Old City for the more modern cleaner neighborhoods in the mid 1900s.

Traditional Buildings and Unmodern People

But who are the people who want to live in the Old City and do they hate it? This question could be answered within the context of discourses of modernity and tradition in Syria. Haitham Hakki the Syrian director, has not only depicted the Old City in many of his dramatized series and documentaries, but has also used his medium of TV dramas to call for its preservation. In a television series he directed *Daret Al-Nar (*Circle of Fire) an official commented on an intramural neighborhood:

[49] This is the case in many cities around the world where the poor and marginalized do not receive the services the rich and powerful do. See Sanjek (1998) and Davila (2004) on New York.

> We cannot stand by and see our dear citizens living in these old houses that have become dangerous. They can burn or fall on the people. We have to provide them with decent shelter and our city with a respectable sight. The tourist should not have to come and see that we still live in these old houses that only indicate backwardness, disease, and ignorance.

This fictionalized speech reflected many of the ideas that continued to circulate by those who thought that only the new is modern. Many officials and other Syrians believed that the Old City was a natural disaster waiting to happen and that it should be demolished and new neighborhoods built in its place with modern apartment buildings in place of the courtyard houses. As Hakki indicated in a previous chapter modernization is this very act: the demolition of old neighborhoods and the construction of new ones in their place. This discourse of modernity remained in circulation when it came to the future of the Old City. Though there were more voices calling for its preservation, there were some who would not mind demolishing the Old City. It is a position that Hakki found alarming if not dangerous but concedes that many people see the Old City as backward and dirty and that is why he included this exchange in his TV drama. He believed the first step was to convince skeptical officials and individuals that it was worth preserving and that houses of mud and straw were not primitive or inferior to cement ones.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett noted to be modern is to have a heritage, which in the Old City meant a new way of looking at historic material and in turn the built environment. [50] Those who seek to purchase property in the Old City and contribute to its historic preservation consider those who live there as contributing to its decline and decay, therefore the heritage of the intramural center needs to be saved from the residents. From the onset I want to clarify that I do not consider this as some nefarious plot to depopulate the Old City, as I will illustrate in the next chapter the current inhabitants are in some cases eager to sell their homes in the name of their own modernity and move from the Old City.[51] Many officials do not want to see the depopulation of the Old City, yet their presence remains problematic. This brings to the forefront the question about the role or lack there of for residents of a historic center in its historic preservation.

In many instances people who live in the Old City are perceived as more traditional and conservative than those who live in other parts of Damascus. In my experience having lived in both the Old City and the new neighborhoods, I have found the people in the historic neighborhoods are no more or less traditional than those living elsewhere.[52] However, since social behavior and practice is linked to where one lives,

[50] From her presentation at AAA December 2005 Washington, DC.
[51] In her work on the gentrification of East Harlem Davila reports similar attitudes towards change in their environment where residents by "supporting consumption and entertainment projects…residents are furthering gentrification and increasing prices in East Harlem, thereby hindering their own future claim to the area" (2002:4).
[52] Although the impression is that Christians living in the Old City tend to be more liberal than their Muslim neighbors, they still maintain the same restrictions and social behavior. In predominately Muslim neighborhoods women may not be as visible in the public spaces as in Christian neighborhoods. But then this may be attributed to class, since most of the Christians in the Old City tend to be from rural areas whereas a higher percentage of Muslim women in the Old City are from Damascus.

the Old City as unmodern place indicates that people who live there are as well.[53] I will deal in the next chapter exclusively with houses and how they are transformed from residence to tourist facilities but here I will discuss the bayt ʻarabī within the context of who lives in it and what this says about them.

The government guidelines for the preservation of buildings in the Old City state that historic material should be used, such as mud, wood and stone. Yet, there is no consensus on the role of historic material as opposed to modern material in the restoration process and furthermore, officials have no way to ensure the implementation of this regulation. Since houses are built from mud mixed with straw they begin to crumble if they are not annually maintained. This has led many residents to use cement when renovating their homes to avoid the annual expenditure. As Salim an architect and contractor who had worked on several projects in the Old City including the restoration and renovation of houses into restaurants and hotels said: "Old houses are for a specific class of people, they cost too much to maintain."

If houses are well maintained the building materials of mud, straw, and wood is considered by many Syrians to be inferior to modern material like cement. As Ahmed has pointed out "cement is part of involuntary development, but we do not know to what extent the use of both modern and old material can be agreeable." In some cases it has been documented that mixing modern and earlier building materials can hasten the pace

[53] See Salamandra (2004) especially Chapter 2 where she discusses how class and therefore behavior is associated with place of residence in Damascus.

of decomposition. However, as Ahmed has noted to be modern one has to choose modern building material when constructing their homes.

This is further supported by how the earlier material crumbles and accumulates dirt and filth in the alleys. Thus the historic houses themselves are polluting the Old City. This dirt does not only reflect the quality of the building material but the people who live in the crumbling houses. According to Mary Douglas "pollution beliefs can be used in a dialogue of claims and counter-claims to status" (1966:13) where these people for whatever reason allow their houses to deteriorate are accorded a "marginal state" in the role of the future of the Old City. As Douglas states "A polluting person is always in the wrong" (1996:136) thus the inhabitants of the Old City are considered as the cause of this decay because they live in these houses and are unable to maintain them and keep the alleys clean. (Figure 6)

Figure 7: Bayt 'Arabī in ruins

Crumbling Buildings

In Chapter Two I talked about how the French were proficient in the discourse of tradition and modernity in urban planning. In their efforts to preserve historic cities they defined them as artifacts and relics of a past incompatible with modern urbanism. Under the independent Syrian state much of this colonial discourse remained since many of the native urban planners and architects were trained in France or by the French.[54] The appeals to preserve the Old City were a result of the belief that the historic built environment was not compatible with modern life, rather the historic and aesthetic quality were valuable for future generations. The urban fabric needed to be preserved because seemingly notions of identity and culture were embedded within the courtyard houses and alleys. In these appeals there was no mention of improving living conditions for people that lived there. The prevailing belief at the time was eventually everyone would want to move out of the Old City to the newer neighborhoods.

In a paper given at the "Old Damascus Seminar" in 1982 one of the panelists offered this explanation for the deterioration of the Old City:

> The general decay for the historic center can be attributed to demographics and social causes. The only built environment found until the 18th century was the area within the walls (the current historic center). In the outskirts lived the rural migrant but in the intramural neighborhood lived a class that was well-off. These were able to adapt the historic fabric with new demands. ..Population increase and desertion of the center enabled rural

[54]See (Zeifa 2004) on the French trained Syrian engineers.

> migrants to flow to inside the walls and they began to populate the old center with new social classes that did not possess the ability to maintain the historic center because they lacked a sense of belonging to the Old City. I add to this that the general decay is also a result of the state of the buildings themselves and the materials used in construction. (Kawakibi 1982:135-6)

The decay of the Old City was attributed to its abandonment by its "original" inhabitants who should have maintained and taken care of it as well as the unmodern building material.[55] The rural migrants who moved into the vacated neighborhoods reconstructed the rural spaces they left behind. As a European Art Historian working on the Old City said: "The city was first killed in the 1960s when the original inhabitants moved out. Villagers never developed it; they were housed in it and once made money moved out."

In addition to the social and economic reasons that have led to the deterioration of the Old City, the policy for its historic preservation has ironically contributed to the decay of historic buildings. In this policy no physical alteration could take place in the built environment. As mentioned earlier, buildings must conform to the cadastral plan made by the French in the 1920s and 1930s. In the 1940s and 1950s when many of these houses were sold or rented they underwent drastic transformations to meet the changes

[55] Not all who left the Old City adapted a modern lifestyle. Thompson (2000) reports how Al-Haffar one of the prominent politicians of Damascus during the French Mandate left for a modern neighborhoods but kept many of the habits and lifestyle associated with the Old City quarters and neighborhoods though he no longer lived there.

wrought by modernization and new inhabitants. This included, but was not limited to, the construction of kitchens and bathrooms. If a house was occupied by several families this meant that each would have their own kitchen and bathroom. According to the government guidelines these additions in the mid-20th century were considered inferior and of no aesthetic or historical quality. In the preservation guidelines they had to be removed so that the house could revert to its original state as depicted in the cadastral map. Earlier material must be used in the reconstruction or renovation process so the house could retain its historic feel. These days with even more modern amenities people do not want to live in turn of the century houses made of mud and straw. Inhabitants have found ways around laws and regulations when renovating their houses or left them to crumble.

Nadeem an architect who worked with the government in an office overseeing the Old City agreed that these laws were rather rigid:

> It is nice we now can talk about the Old City after years of neglect. But we need a realistic image. I feel even today we are too strict in our rules to preserve. Ok we are using old material to keep certain forms. But the Old City is not a project done once. It is an accumulation of years, styles, even houses built bit by bit nothing is pure, it is eclectic architecture. We are too strict when we say that people are not allowed to add rooms. I think we should be more flexible they need freedom to live their lives in this century. What we consider problems today should be seen as people's

needs e.g. aluminum windows, modern tiles. … They need to feel that being in the Old City should not prevent them from having a modern life.

Rural Migrants in the City

Investors and those involved in the preservation process believe the people who live there have no real claim on the city and therefore should not be part of its future. Since they are largely of a rural background they have no appreciation for urban architect, and are unable to comprehend the significance of the Old City today. Rather as Nadia Khost says: "The Old City is the area with relatively lower house prices. The houses were divided and rented. The houses were divided and their decorations ruined. People who live in them came from the villages and did not feel nor knew the value of these houses. Sometimes they remove the ornaments and sold them."

Salim an architect who in addition to working on restoring old houses owns several properties in the Old City believed that

The people here have inherited [the Old City] they did not build it. There is a difference between I build and I inherit. If I want to build now I build with what suits me currently, but if I inherit I inherit what has suited my ancestors…this house has renters now we can evict them. Before we were unable to evict them…[56] I don't consider those people as residents. They only live here because they have no choice. Is this one maintaining a

[56] He is referring to new legislature that went into effect February 2004 that permits landlords to evict renters if they refuse to increase rent to what is considered a fair rate. This law will be dealt with later in the dissertation.

house, look [here he points to a house bordering his property]. They are renters. If a person wants to live in the Old City and they are not convinced with living here, I do not want them here. In my opinion those who live here have to be content with living here…All people now run towards modernization. People want to be modern, they have to live in a flat, in a comfortable house. Then, they only live here because of the cheap rent. They did not move here because they wanted to live in the Old City. These houses were the cheapest available in Old Damascus. Now this house has eight families, each room has a family and each family is 7-8 members so what do they feel about the Old City…I consider they are bad for Old Damascus, Old Damascus means nothing to them and we can go and see houses that are rented, they are a treasure but who has destroyed this treasure? The renters who live in them. They painted the stone, they removed marble and put in ceramic tiles. All are like this. They do not live here to preserve Old Damascus.

This discourse is not new when talking about Damascus or the Old City for that matter, but is consistent with claims over space and place as well as the history embedded in them. Urban modernization projects either in the name of historic preservation, urban renewal or gentrification pathologizes inhabitants and deny them any claim to place. In the Old City the rural migrants are perceived as unworthy to be protectors of this history or guardians of the built environment. In the process of modernization the "other" is found in this group who currently claims the space. In her work on gentrification of East

Harlem, Davila (2004) reports similar attitudes towards the Puerto Rican inhabitants who through the process of racialization are unable to capitalize on the development and modernization of the neighborhoods as compared to other ethnic minorities, such as the Italians, who also claim the space as theirs.[57] She writes, "the racialization of Puerto Ricans prevents them from commodifying aspects of their culture. Constructed as such, the latter's culture was deemed to have less "heritage" value, rendering Puerto Ricanness always less marketable than Italian culture." (2004:114)

In the Old City a similar process is taking place where the current inhabitants are being marginalized because of their rural origins. This is not only by the Damascenes but by other rural migrants in the Old City who attained the status of cosmopolitans. Such is the case of one of my Syrian acquaintance Fadwa who lives in the Old City but comes from a city in the north. We went to visit one of the new art galleries that had recently opened in the Old City. The owner talked to us about how he purchased the house and was renovating it to include workspace and exhibition halls. Fadwa was excited by the changes in the courtyard house. Although she lives in one near mine, she hated her rooms. "They are in a poor condition and the landlord refuses to do the proper maintenance." She was happy that someone was doing something with these homes instead of letting them decay.

[57] Similar attitudes emerge in the preservation of Times Square, see Reichl (1999) and Harlem see Jackson (2002). See also Holleran (1998) work on the history of historic preservation in Boston where the Italian and Irish immigrants were considered as the reason for the decline of Brahmin Boston led to efforts for the preservation of certain areas of the city. Hartigan (1999) reports that the racialization of poor whites from the south in Detroit marginalizes their claim to space.

Fadwa had no sympathy for the people living in one of the homes we stopped on our way to see. This house was once the property of a rich merchant of the 19th century and contained several richly decorated rooms, most of which were now in ruins. The rooms that were barely livable housed several families. Fadwa said "They should be kicked out. See how they are ruining this place. They do not pay rent and don't move out preferring to live in this dump waiting for the government to take over or someone to buy it so that they can get compensation." I tried to argue that they do not pay because they have no money and she replied "Of course they do, they work, they all do, I pay 4000 sp (US$ 80) for dilapidated rooms let them pay like everyone else."

Although Fadwa is not from Damascus but lives in the Old City she shares the belief that those who live in the Old City are contributing to its decline. She is an aspiring cosmopolitan. She works as a tour guide in the Old City and had developed a different appreciation for the Old City. It is not home as much as it is heritage and history. Although she lacked the financial means to purchase a bayt ʿarabī and convert it into a restaurant, art gallery, or hotel, nonetheless, she appreciates these efforts by other cosmopolitans. In her view they are protecting the Old City.

Shwām in the Old City

One of the most common belief among many cosmopolitans is that the Old City is inhabited mainly by non-Damascenes. Yet there are several Damascenes who continue to live in their ancestral homes in the neighborhoods where their families come. One

such example is Qusay, the son of one of the most prominent families of Damascus who still lives in his family home in the Old City, where I arranged to meet and interview him.

Qusay's home is in the middle of a bustling street near Hariqa and close to Suq Hamadiyeh. The street was once largely residential within easy access to the main suq area in the Old City but since the mid-1950s has steadily become more commercial as houses were converted into shops. On a beautiful warm and sunny day in early May I stood in front of the big brown and still imposing wooden residential door holding its own amidst the shops. I rang the bell and waited impatiently, feeling certainly uncomfortable from being watched by the shopkeepers around me. I remained focused on the door. Nothing. I rang again and stepped a bit back to see if any windows on the second level were open. I turned ever so slightly and the shopkeeper sitting behind me on a wooden chair basking in the sun in front of his store offered "you have to really ring the bell. The house is big and they might not hear." I thanked him kindly suspecting he was used to seeing Qusay's visitors exasperated by the bell.

Eventually, Qusay opened the door and apologized for not hearing me earlier. I smiled, grateful to be indoors away from the watchful eyes of the shopkeepers. I had seen the courtyard before several months ago when it was cold and grey but he showed me again the nice spacious courtyard flooded with sunlight with a water fountain and citrus fruit trees. Since it was getting warmer, the family had moved downstairs, and the courtyard seemed more alive than when I had first seen it. He ushered me upstairs to the family's living room where he had his office in the corner of the huge salon. We sat in the salon with an ornate ceiling.

I began by asking my general introductory question on how the neighborhood has changed. He told me he has heard from his neighbors how the narrow street was once largely houses of his extended family before they began to leave for the newer neighborhoods and spacious apartments in the 1940s and 1950s. He had lived in this house all his life and he knew the owners of the stores and their descendents who were now his only neighbors. He told me how the house had also changed that it was bigger in the past with three sections but now there was only the part where he and his mother live. His great aunt used to live in the house next door and he remembered as a child going to visit her, but now he repeated there is only the house in which he lived in since his relatives had sold their homes and moved to Malki, an elite neighborhood in Damascus.

He was telling me how they sometimes came and visited and as on cue, the door bell rang and his cousin with two sons came up. They lived in Malki and often visit. After they left Qusay told me that they tell him how they like the house and how he should not sell it since now it is the only residence in the Old City that still belongs to the family. And then he added: "If you ask them to come and live here they would say no."

Though in his 30s, he does recall a time when everyone wanted to sell old houses and move to the new residential areas. "They wanted to change the neighborhoods in the Old City for something fancy." There was a time when living in an old house meant "being poor or old fashion." But Qusay had always loved the house. He would visit friends and relatives in Malki but not feel comfortable there. He liked the cathedral ceilings, the garden, the feeling of a courtyard house. For him the house was very much the life of his father and grandfather. He told me "My father didn't want to sell. He saw

his own father in the house and believed that much died when the owner of the house died. The house has its own character and life and so he kept it as his [the father's] cousins and brothers sold their inheritance and moved."

Furthermore, Qusay described how the changes in the regime in the early 1960s that brought a peasant based ruling elite to power and left many of the urban notables in a precarious situation.[58] Families that belonged to a certain class prior 1960s were considered enemies of the new regime. Since one could tell by the family's name to which class one belonged, Qusay's father suffered the burden of being from a prominent family. He was forced to quite his job as a judge and that made him even more determined to hold on to the house which was an emblem of the great family and of times past. Qusay continued in his father's footsteps and has now seen a renewed interest in the Old City which in some ways vindicates his father and grandfather's memory. The Old City was becoming fashionable again.

The bayt 'arabī in the Old City for Qusay as a shāmī has become a reaffirmation of his origins and his identity. Today as the Old City is enjoying a new status as the locus of heritage and history Qusay has acquired new social status by virtue of remaining in the house. Though, his house is no longer in a residential district as attested by the shops who are his only neighbors, this remains inconsequential since his steadfastness indicates his identity as a shāmī is closely linked to place specifically the house in the Old City.

[58] For more information on the transformation of Syrian elites from an urban to a rural basis see Van Dusen (1975). Also Batatu (1999) on the role of rural notables in Syrian politcs.

The fact that the house is richly decorated and retains the historic elements of a bayt ʻarabī contributes to the social status of Qusay.

But Qusay's story is unique among the shwām notables who traced their ancestral homes to the intramural quarters. Many less prominent families have continued to live in the historic quarters for a variety of reasons. Nonetheless, they still remain as part of the problem of the Old City, as discussed earlier. To have lived there for many years is not the same as to move in now. Many of those who currently seek to live in the Old City do so not because of the cheap rent but because of the history and heritage found there.

Locals and Cosmopolitans

For many of the shwām their identity is rooted in the Old City because that is where they originate. On government issued identity cards, the place of origin is highlighted for all Syrians. The old neighborhoods remain present in the imagination of Damascenes because they are listed on their ID cards. In addition to listing the original neighborhoods, the ID cards also rank the families from the most to least established. It should be noted that some of the staunchest supporters for the preservation of the Old City are not shwām or even Syrian. Damascus has come to mean many things for many people mainly as part of Arab and world history. Nonetheless, shwām still talk about how they are different from other Syrians because of their genealogical ties to the city.

At many times when I was exasperated by my landlady's daughter I would complain to my shwām friends and they would say one word "*ḥawārnah*." Ḥawārnah is the plural of ḥ*ourani (*someone from Ḥaurān the region in southern Syria). But it is more

than just ancestral roots. Ḥawārnah becomes not only an identity but a reference to behavior and practices. Coming from a predominately rural region, ḥawārnah are distinguished from shwām by their speech, use of certain words, practices and in some instances by their names. When my complaints were answered by ḥawārnah I was to understand that what has irritated me was due to these practices that are essential to ḥawārnah. My friends were not surprised or taken aback by what my landlady's daughter said or did but with me for thinking that it is something I should get upset over. Living as I did amongst ḥawārnah I should have been prepared for this kind of practice and talk.[59]

Although many of these locals with rural roots have been living in the Old City for decades they are still perceived as transient (cf Davila 2004). The shwām with their official documentation may live any where in the world and claim Damascus as theirs which supersedes the claims of those who actually live there.

The current inhabitants of the Old City are also engaged in certain practices and behaviors with regards to the built environment that are not approved by shwām. Many families supplement their income by renting rooms, and this leads to another division among people in Damascus as was the case in Haret Hanania where I lived in 2003-2004. This predominately Christian neighborhood is currently largely populated by Christian villagers from the Ḥaurān.[60] My shwām friends told me that it was only the ḥawārnah

[59] Hartigan (1999) also points to a similar process when he talks about the arrival of southern whites to Detroit and how they were labeled as "hillbillies" "a stigmatized intraracial distinction articulating a sense of refinement and sophistication that these "rude," out-of-place whites could not attain" (18) In the Syrian context race is not an issue as origins especially the distinction between rural and urban populations.
[60] It should be noted that in my experience and conversations with Syrians neighborhoods by and large have maintained their sectarian identity except in the case of the Jewish Quarter. However, the historic sectarian make-up of the Old City is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

who would cram into one room and rent the remainder of the rooms in the house. Shwām do not rent if they do not need the money. Ḥawārnah whether they do or do not need the money, rent their rooms. One friend told me a shāmī may be poor but one could never tell by how s/he acts. However, both shwām and non-Damascene currently living in the Old City rented rooms. Moreover, in the historic preservation programs both were also involved. The difference emerges not between original and non-original inhabitants but how they relate to the historic city center.

Ḥawārnah are quick to retort to the accusations and have their views about shwām. As one of my ḥawārnah informants told me: "Shwām are jealous of us because we are hardworking and are educated. Look at the shwām they do not go to college, they enter a trade. They only care about money."

Origins remain important in Syria. It is used to categorize people in order to explain and predict behavior.[61] Although this essentialized discourse is many times fraught with stereotypes and bigotry, it guides people when dealing with others. Officials at borders insisted on my origins once they decided I was not really an American. Once a person's origins are determined his or her actions are predictable. I lost count of the numerous times Syrians would say to me "You Palestinians do this or that." I will talk more about origin in Chapter Six.

[61] Behavior is a maker of identity, as well as class and race. Jackson uses behavior among African Americans in Harlem to talk about class and race difference (2001). He ties behavior with place and illustrates how certain practices are used to determine "racial authenticity and inauthenticity" (228) which in turn support a claim that they are from Harlem.

The ḥawārnah are described by others as bringing their rural practices and behaviors to the Old City and therefore not learning how to be like the shwām. They have negatively impacted the Old City with this behavior. Malik a young restaurant owner in Haret Hanania and a proud shāmī said to me: "Villagers are tough, they have different behaviors. In Damascus it is important to keep peace, keep relations going, and bring hearts closer together. Villagers don't become shwām, they don't have the love of shwām, they might pick up some habits but they remain different."

The non-Damascene who has moved to the Old City has redefined the space through their practice and beliefs. They live along side the shwām who still reside in the Old City. Shwām might distinguish themselves from the non-Damascene and claim that their different practices and discourses set them apart. However, since they live in the Old City and the Old City is crumbling they are in turn implicated in its decay. The inhabitants of the Old City whether they are shwām or not have not been good stewards of the heritage because they failed to recognize its importance and significance. They did this by insisting on living in a heritage site and by keeping it populated their daily activities are causing it to decay and decompose.

Cosmopolitans insist they are most concerned about the future of the Old City. They are influenced by ideas of modernization that views the Old City in terms of its cultural capital and symbolic economy (Zukin 1999). They view renting a house to several tenants an unmodern activity as compared to restoring a house to its origins and finding a new use for it as a hotel, restaurant, or even art gallery. For cosmopolitans this is the way to preserve the Old City and showcase it to tourists, locally and internationally,

who will come to see a chic restaurant, upscale hotel, or an exclusive art gallery. Locals on the other hand just want to live there in comfortable homes that have modern conveniences but not necessarily aged ornamental elements. They are not interested in the heritage of their homes or want to put them on display.

It also follows that the locals remain bounded in their experience, though this is less likely in a world linked by satellite television and in their interaction with cosmopolitans. By bounded I mean they turn inward toward their neighborhoods and the social relations they find there. Hannerz states "for most of these locals, the cosmopolitan is someone a little unusual, one of us and yet not quite one of us. Someone to be respected for his experiences, possibly, but equally possibly not somebody to be trusted as a matter of course" (Hannerz 1996:110). Cosmopolitans on the other hand retain social ties and community outside the neighborhoods. Their interaction with the locals remains limited and formal.

One interesting case of a cosmopolitan was Omar who acquired several old buildings in the Old City that he transformed into cafes and restaurants. He was also famous in the intellectual scene in Damascus because he provided a venue for artists to display their work. His family came from a village five hours north of Damascus and he spoke of it nostalgically during our interview when I was asking about his decision to invest in the Old City. He insisted I should go visit the village, it was green and cool in the summer and not like Damascus hot and dry. When I asked where he currently lived he almost apologetically told me in the Old City. By the time of our interview I had become fluent in my knowledge of the alleys and the neighborhood and as I pressed him

to tell me exactly where he lived he remained vague. He was not happy with the house, he said. It was cold in the winter difficult to keep clean. I also imagined that he may have been investing in renovating shops and houses into restaurants and cafes but not in his house.

This schism is interesting on several levels. If Omar highlighted the fact he was born and raised in the Old City he would be considered a local and not the more fashionable and higher social status of cosmopolitan. I suspected based on my field work experience in the Old City that the house he grew up in and still lived in might be badly in need of repair, the paint peeling in some rooms, dampness on the walls, the bathroom old, and the furniture outdated. His family might not even own the house but rented and therefore it was not a priority for him or his family to fix it up. Chances were if they did consider purchasing a house they would have done so outside the Old City in some of the newer fashionable neighborhoods.

Omar was by no means an exception. After meeting many people who lived in the Old City, many of them did not want me to visit their homes, especially if they happened to be projecting an image of themselves as cosmopolitan. This image would be belied by their place of residence that indicated they were local. It became a very interesting exercise to guess where I would get invited and where I did not. Omar who was not a shāmī had to work harder at attaining a respectable social standing since he lacked the distinction of being one, unlike Qusay, though he was raised and still resided in the Old City. Through his cafes and restaurants he had achieved a certain cosmopolitan status which would be undermined if he took me to his house. Unlike

Qusay he did not have the social status of being a shāmī living in the Old City, nor was he from the recent group of cosmopolitans entering the city.

Omar is part of the cosmopolitans who have purchased property in the Old City. As mustathmirīn (investors), they see themselves as "protectors" of the Old City by this act. I will talk more about mustathmirīn in Chapter Five. The shwām among them can claim a return to their ancestral home. The non-Damascene can claim the history and heritage of Damascus as their own since they perceive themselves as the only ones with the means to fully appreciate the history and architecture of the historic quarters. They have recently discovered that the Old City is a place brimming with economic and cultural opportunities. Many of these people have homes in the newer neighborhoods of Damascus and not all have the intention of moving to the Old City. They see the Old City as a beautiful jewel that has been neglected and tarnished. Therefore it is incumbent upon them who have the financial means and the cultural upbringing and education to protect the decaying old houses.

Many of these mustathmirīn were directly involved in the renovation of the houses that they spent years looking to purchase. In the Syrian sense cosmopolitans not only have money but they have certain consumption patterns that definitely set them apart from the locals. They are considered '*kābir* a term that refers to refined mannerism, high level of education, social status, and distinguished family background. They may be well read, have traveled abroad, and some may speak foreign languages.

The locals recognized cosmopolitans and mustathmirīn as different from themselves. Their interactions were friendly, but boundaries were maintained. The

cosmopolitans who chose to move to the Old City move into houses they have painstakingly renovated, maintained distinct practices. They did not keep their doors open, they did not sleep on roof tops in the hot summer, and they had people working for them to bring the groceries, cook, clean the house, etc. They would not be seen standing in the doorways or in the street alleys socializing with the neighbors and people in the street. They did not live with extended members of their family in one house. They remained distinguished and set apart as much as by their practice and status.

Furthermore, cosmopolitans are more of a modern western sophistication and it is an impression they would like to maintain with specific social practices. These practices have to do with where one lives and where one goes to socialize. But living all one's life in the Old City does not indicate that one is a cosmopolitan. On the other hand, if one had moved there recently, within the past 10 years to a house that one not only had bought but had painstakingly refurbished, restored, or renovated with great attention to its history and aesthetics, then this was a mustathmir. Many of these who have moved to the Old City recently did so not so much for the ambiance of the neighborhood as much as owning a historic and artistic house. Hence, one of the new ways that members of the cosmopolitans distinguish themselves has to do with the relationship with houses in the Old City. The renovation and preservation of a house becomes an expression of good taste and appreciation for history and art.

Conclusion

As discussed above, the modernization of the Old City has led to the creating of an "unmodern" other in the form of the locals or the inhabitants of the Old City who are considered transient. They are not the true descendents of the original builders, therefore contributing to the decay of the Old City. Since many are not originally from Damascus they maintain a tenuous claim on the city although they have been living there for several generations in houses that have been abandoned by the shwām. Origins prove important in not only establishing a claim on to the city but possessing a history. This history-and acknowledging this history- are important for modernizing the Old City and making it a place where tourists and locals can interact in historic surroundings and clean spaces. However, since these categories of shwām and non-Damascenes are difficult to substantiate in the historic preservation projects, cosmopolitans and locals locate the differences in discourses regarding the Old City. Locals are those who may acknowledge this history but are not seduced by it nor seek to profit from it therefore they are accused of not being part of the modernity project envisioned by cosmopolitans with the support of the government.

Locals and cosmopolitans can be shwām and non-Damascenes as well as Syrian and non-Syrian. What is important is how they define their association with the Old City and how they view the current changes, regardless of how long they have, or have not, lived there. What is essential is how they perceive the Old City and how they orient their experiences towards it.

When the Old City was perceived as unmodern and backward it was only natural for people to want to leave. Since the villagers came to houses vacated by the shwām they kept this perception that these houses are not modern. Hence, claims that they ruined these houses by tiling and painting and removing and selling the ornaments neglects the fact that the shwām have left them in the first place. Today in the new wave of modernization sweeping the region and playing out in the cityscape the offense is in not recognizing this treasure. The locals whether they are shwām or not are deemed unworthy of the Old City because they have not participated in its modernization in ways compatible with preservation. It is the difference that lies between the use of history and heritage of the Old City for distinct purposes.

Chapter Five: "Khay![62]Now We Pay to Enter a Bayt ʻArabī:" Investing in the Old City

In this chapter I examine the different ṭabaqāt of discourses surrounding the bayt ʻarabī. Historic preservation efforts are leading to new ways of relating to the courtyard house especially among locals and cosmopolitans. The vernacular architecture in the intramural neighborhoods is the focus of the historic preservation efforts, as homes and shops purchased by cosmopolitans are refurbished as restaurants, hotels, or art galleries.[63] Over the past 50 years monuments and places of worship in the Old City were protected and underwent several layers of preservation and renovation,[64] but vernacular architecture has not been the main focus of preservation efforts in the Old City until recently.[65] Long-term inhabitants negotiate the transformation of the vernacular built environment into heritage sites and tourist establishments through their own changes to the bayt ʻarabī.

Locals have consistently maintained a connection to their neighborhoods as they modified their homes and places of work to accommodate new technologies and building styles. At times this process had been hampered by the laws regulating the historic preservation of the Old City as we shall see in Chapter Six. Nonetheless, this process of

[62] An exclamation of relief or surprise depending on the context. Here it was uttered in surprise.
[63] By vernacular architecture I mean the homes, stores, workshops, tanneries, soap factories, bathhouses, stables, bakeries, and other forms of the built environment that compose a residential neighborhood. See Rabbat (2002) on the composition of a traditional ḥārah or neighborhood.
[64] For example see Degeorge (1995) on the preservation of the Umayyad Mosque.
[65] In the 1980s several "treasure" homes were expropriated by the government and restored such as Bayt Nizam and Bayt Sibia. These two homes were considered the epitome of the Damascus local architecture. See Keenan (2000) for a description of these and other richly decorated houses.

modernization was considered by officials and cosmopolitans as ruining the Old City rather than protecting it. Whereas locals saw homes and places of work as such, cosmopolitans saw them as heritage and investment. This was best illustrated by the bayt ʻarabī, which was the main feature of many of the neighborhoods, but had undergone major transformation in the name of heritage and historic preservation. Increasingly the bayt ʻarabī no longer serves as a home but is a restaurant, hotel, or art gallery. Cosmopolitans argued that these houses were no longer viable for modern living, and the only way to preserve them was through this change in function.

I argue that these houses were rendered unviable for modern living in order for them to become "ethnographic objects." Intertwined with this desire for preservation was the "symbolic economy" of the Old City where culture is marketed in history and heritage embedded in these structures. I will demonstrate how this eventually led to the gentrification of the intramural neighborhoods of Damascus. The symbolic economy is Syria's entry into the global economy. Heritage making and gentrification both emphasize the decay and decline of the Old City in order to stress the need for mustathmirīn and ʾstthmār (investment) that are the only recourse to reviving the neighborhoods.

The *Bayt ʻArabī*

The vernacular built environment in Damascus had been historically constructed from stone, mud, straw, and wood materials locally found in the region. The courtyard style of building was not only for houses but for places of worship and business such as

the mosque and inns. The open courtyard was considered ecologically compatible with the hot dry climate during most of the year in Damascus. The open interior space buffered from the heat and sheltered from the cold. In a typical bayt ʻarabī the courtyard was located in the center of the structure, open to the sky and surrounded by two stories of rooms. The first story was usually built of stone and the second from mud and wood. On the ground level the main room that oriented the house was the iwan,[66] a room with three walls and the fourth open onto the courtyard. It was the summer sitting room which always faced north and was never hit directly by the sun. In the summer it was cool and refreshing even during the hottest hours of the day to sit in the iwan. These houses were common among the middle class merchants of Damascus. I have chosen the courtyard house as a prototype of the dwelling in the Old City of Damascus since it is the most common found there. Furthermore, it has emerged with this discourse of heritage as the quintessential type of dwelling in Damascus.[67]

In the prototype of a bayt ʻarabī either side of the iwan are two rooms called qāʻah (hall) that open either to the courtyard or to the iwan. The iwan and the two qāʻah were the main reception rooms in a house thus they tend to display the owner's wealth in the form of decorations. Two of the most common forms of decoration are *ʾblaq* and *ʻjamī*. *ʾblaq* is a geometric pattern that is carved and filled with a paste of powdered colored stone usually red and black but can also include other colors. *ʻjamī* decorations are patterns painted on wood around the walls and ceiling. Both of these elements were

[66] For more information on the historic uses of *iwan* in Arab-Islamic architecture see Rabbat (1997).
[67] See Rabbat (2002) for a description of the different types of dwelling that existed in Damascus.

valued in houses. In houses purchased by cosmopolitan they were added where they did not exist.[68] (Figure 7) A bayt ʻarabī usually housed an extended family of several generations. The father would live in a house with his sons and their families. Sometimes other relatives would live in the house such as aunts, uncles, cousins, nephews, or nieces. Each son and his family would have a room or rooms, depending on the size of the house, where they slept. The entire household would share the common areas, the courtyard, iwan, *qāʻah* and the kitchen.

[68] Elements like an iwan or fountain and decorations like ablaq or ajami are today considered essential component for a courtyard house though this was not always an architectural feature. Qasatali writing in 1879 states: "As for interior arrangement of houses it is mostly these days an *iwan* and on both sides of it a room. The remaining rooms face one another and have lots of windows with glass which is called *frankat* and each house must have a *sahan* [courtyard] and in some houses they have cellars where people store provisions." Qassatli (2004[1879]:166). He indicates that iwans have become more fashionable and basic feature of the courtyard house during the late 1800s.

Figure 8: Iwan

In a typical bayt ʻarabī, the rooms were not connected internally. In order to get from one room to another, one had to go outside the room to the courtyard or the corridor on the second level and enter the other room. The courtyard was the center of the house through which all movement in and out took place. In one corner of the courtyard was a staircase that led to the second story which was surrounded by rooms. In another was a kitchen and bathroom. Sometimes the toilet was located near the front door. The fountain, in some courtyards, cooled the lower level, the evaporation of the water, the black and white pattern of flagstones on the floor of the courtyard all worked to buffer the

hot dry air. There were citrus trees offering shade, jasmine and roses providing a pleasant smell In the courtyard.

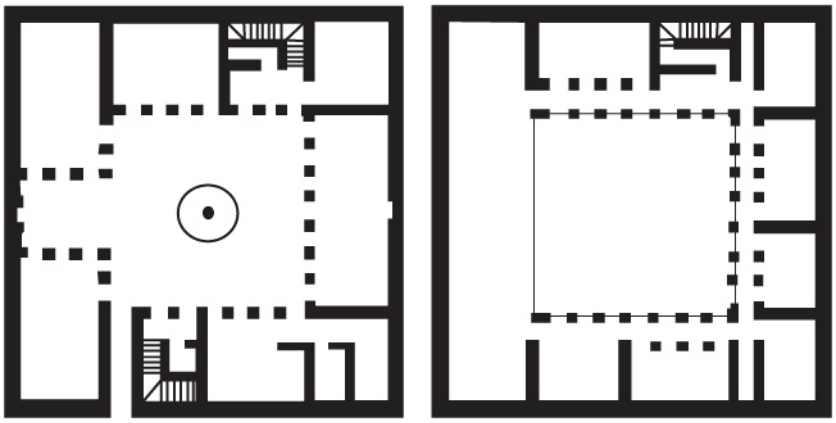

Figure 9: Bayt ʻArabī Plan
The diagram on the left depicts the first floor with the iwan and fountain. The diagram on the right is the second floor adapted from (Rabbat 2002)

Many of the courtyard houses that have remained in existence to this day in the Old City, had undergone massive transformation over the years. It is rare to find a bayt ʻarabī with the exact description above. Due to inheritance laws and rent control many houses have been divided into several units, and what is today an independent residence may have been part of a larger house. Many owners had modified their homes either by closing the courtyard to convert it into another room, opening rooms onto one another, or dividing the iwan into two levels. These modifications were a response to the owner's interpretation of modernity where they made their homes not only comfortable but more suited to nuclear families. As less extended families tended to live together, the houses became too big for a smaller family unit. Nonetheless, many of today's investors seek

the "authentic" or "original" bayt ʻarabī one with a courtyard and fountain with an iwan opening to the north and flanked by two qāʻah opposite which are rooms.[69]

'Stthmār in the Old City

I was invited to a party at Mustafa Ali's new art gallery in the Old City. Ali is one of Syria's foremost modern sculptors whose work has been exhibited in Syria and Europe. He had recently purchased a bayt ʻarabī and converted the rooms into a work space and exhibition area. He kept, for the most part, the original layout of the house. I met friends and acquaintances who had not been in a bayt ʻarabī before or at least one as nice as Ali's, and they were visibly impressed. It had all the elements of an aesthetically pleasing courtyard house. In the middle of the courtyard was a gurgling fountain shaded by a Quince tree and surrounded by rose bushes. The simple yet elegant iwan was flanked by two modestly decorated qāʻah which now served as display spaces for the sculptor's work. Across from the iwan were rooms that were converted into workshops. Other rooms on the ground level were refurbished as office space.

I was sitting with friends in the courtyard around the fountain talking when one of them turned to me and enthusiastically asked: "Do you live in a house like this?" I thought of the room I rented in a house that was once part of a larger one, the courtyard truncated and covered, the fountain long gone, no iwan, and no decorations of any sort in the rooms. I replied almost apologetically: "No I don't."

[69] In some cases mustathmirīn purchase several houses of what they perceive to have been a single unit and "revert" the structure to the original by knocking down walls and adding fountains and iwan.

As an art gallery, hotel, or restaurant a bayt ʿarabī assumed added significance by the virtue of its location in the Old City. Cosmopolitans who were active in the purchase of property in the Old City were locally known as mustathmirīn (investors).[72] Many locals in Haret Hanania where I conducted research referred to owners of restaurants as mustathmirīn. The word came from the root ʿ*stthmār* (investment), as matter of fact no current mention of the Old City can take place without the mention of mustathmirīn whose role is essential for reproducing the official representation of the Old City. In an interview with the Deputy Minister of Culture he stressed that in all his meetings with officials on the future of the Old City the term ʿstthmār is the recurrent theme. "Syria needs new resources," he says. The opening of restaurants, hotels, and art galleries, falls under the rubric of investment that can compete on the global level as mustathmirīn rise to the occasion.

The term has many connotations. In addition to the factual suggestion of being rich and well-connected, it also denotes a sense of fleetingness. For locals who actually live and in many instances work in the neighborhood, they have a strong sense of belonging, of rootedness to the ḥārah. For a local to sell one's house and move was no easy matter and might take years before a decision was finally made. However, for a mustathmir, it was not an agonizing a process. They were in the business of buying and

[72] The singular is mustathmir *(*investor).

selling houses and their presence in the neighborhood lasted as long as profit could be made, a fact not lost on many people.[73]

Mustathmirīn has similar connotations to "place entrepreneurs" (Molotch as quoted in Zukin 1995:7), since they are also able to manipulate the symbolic economy of cities into real development. The local mustathmirīn are selling the image of courtyard houses as sites of heritage when they convert them into restaurants or hotels. The symbolic value of these tourist establishments increases when they are located in the Old City instead of some other neighborhood in Damascus; what separates them from other establishments is their location in the historic city. Furthermore, the symbolic economy entails the manipulation of the "symbolic languages of exclusion and entitlement. The look and feel of cities reflect decisions about what-and who-should be visible and what should not, on concepts of order and disorder, and on the uses of aesthetic power" (Zukin 1995:7). Cosmopolitans by definition have access to resources and power that they are willing to employ in order to further their representation of the Old City but they also need the good will of the locals to see their projects through.

Mustathmirīn like Mustapha Ali were space entrepreneurs who were able to use the symbols of a bayt ʿarabī and the history of the Old City that could not be replicated elsewhere in the city. Ali had managed to produce a unique environment for the display and making of his art. Thus not only was he involved in the reshaping of the Old City,

[73] During my fieldwork in Haret Hanania one of the restaurants changed owners almost overnight. The first owner was considered in many regards as part of the neighborhood but his relationship ceased once he sold the restaurant. Locals maintain connections to family and friends in neighborhoods even when they move out.

but he was making the Old City a place "of creation and transformation" (Zukin 1995:8). Ali was involved in the process of improving the neighborhood and bringing in services. He saw his art gallery as beneficial to the neighborhood:

> The neighbors are happy because now people come to the neighborhood. When I first came I found garbage all around and I worked out an agreement with the garbage man to keep the alley clean. I also called the electric company and fixed the lighting in the alley. We get visitors who are diplomats, oil company executives, and tourists and we must present a view of the real Sham[74] (Damascus) before it was distorted.

As Zukin noted "Gentrification, historic preservation, and other strategies to enhance the visual appeal of the urban spaces developed as major trends during the late 1960's and early 1970s" (1995:39). Such trends have continued to this day in defining the visual representation of cities around the world and articulating the shifting economic structure of cities. As industrialization and financial speculation declined in cities many saw the rise of the symbolic economy as the major economic base for many urban centers. Since the 1970s the symbolic economy increasingly became a "symbiosis of image and product, the scope and scale of selling images on a national and even a global level, and the role of the symbolic economy in speaking for, or representing, the city" (8). Thus culture became the major component of the entrepreneur strategies for local investment.

[74] Colloquially and locally Damascus is referred to as Al-Shām, hence shwām and shāmī.

In cities like Damascus that never had a strong industrial base the current global exchanges have led to the emergence of culture as a new economy in the Old City.[75] Ali saw his role as improving the neighborhood not only by purchasing and maintaining a house that he believed would otherwise have fallen into decay, but by the services someone of his stature was able to bring to the ḥārah. Furthermore, his presence elevated the significance of the ḥārah, it was no longer just any neighborhood in the Old City but where the famous sculptor had his studio. He contributed to the improvement of the sanitation and infrastructure of the neighborhood so that it could become a sanitized place for culture in the Old City:

> There is a new transformation in the Old City. First came restaurants and now hotels and I am one of the people who initiated that a section of Damascus should be for art…Art enriches the city. We will have performances, theater music, artistic concepts will now be proposed from the heart of this city…Creativity is the ultimate bliss.

The opening of art galleries in the Old City was part of the endeavors to integrate Syrian economy into the world economy. These spots highlight Damascus as an emerging city on a global scale (Smith 2002:447). Ali was cognizant that his significant customers were foreigners either as expatriates working in the country or tourists. As a cosmopolitan he was attuned to the global climate and how best to package the Old City for an international market. His efforts were in concert with the official policy of the

[75] Commerce remains the basis of the economy in Damascus. I have no figures or statistics to back this up but from discussions and interviews the impression is that commerce is the main economic activity.

state. However, this approach was not without its critics. There is a pun on the Arabic word *taswīḥ* which means touristifying and *tasīḥ* meaning melting. Is this *taswīh* or *tasīh* the Old City? Will the Old City become a tourist destination or disappear in the process?

Zukin also discussed how culture has not only become the business of cities, but was used to control the city and determine who had access to the public places. In the Old City the symbolic economy was based on the industry of culture and heritage. However, there are different implications than in the context of American cities as discussed by Zukin. Granted the city that Ali envisioned will attract individuals from a certain background and class, other cosmopolitans like him, but locals remain part of the ḥārah. During the course of my field work the locals were not excluded from the gentrified areas of the Old City. They could come to the gentrified neighborhoods though they may not afford to frequent restaurants and art galleries.

Investing in the Old City

The process of purchasing and selling houses highlights the role of market forces in the process of heritage and preservation. Furthermore, the investments that were currently taking place in the Old City were leading to the gentrification of the Old City. As Smith had noted gentrification was the discourse of decline of American cities and dominated the attitudes towards cities. Gentrification became the response to this decline in an attempt to reclaim the glorious past of urban spaces (Smith 1996:xiv). "Gentrification pretends a class conquest of the city. The new urban pioneers seek to scrub the city clean of its working –class geography and history. By remaking the

geography of the city they simultaneously rewrite its social history as a preemptive justification for a new urban future" (27).

In the Old City there was a discourse of decline and decay in order to render it prime for investment. Neighbors of restaurants and hotels had seen a marked increase in the value of their property and actually welcomed the opening of tourist investments that made this possible. They also appreciated the improvements in services and sanitation as a result of the new business ventures.

I asked Abu George about the presence of restaurants in the Harat Hanania and he replied without hesitation, "It is a good thing." He explained:

> The restaurants have improved the neighborhood. Now you see people in the streets at night. I used to come home around 11 pm from the coffeehouse outside the Old City and walking through the deserted alley ways I would be terrified. I would not see a living soul. Now there are people, there is light and there is life. You feel the neighborhood is alive.

My landlady also confirmed that restaurants were a good thing. "They light up the alleys. There are people and you do not feel like the alleys are deserted." This may not had been the case initially, but as the residents of Haret Hanania see all the benefits that could come their way from having a restaurant in their midst, they were more accepting and accommodating. In some cases I had heard that neighbors protested the noise and smells that were coming from the restaurants. Some officials had told me they received complaints from neighbors after restaurants opened. However, as far as I am aware there were no guidelines to monitor the restaurants in neighborhoods.

The gentrification of the Old City does exclude the locals who were unable to afford to come to these establishments. As one restaurant owner in the old city told me: "Each restaurant has its customers." Locals, as we will see, seem to agree with this for the most part but until now do not seem threatened by such ideas and accept them as a matter of fact.

Smith also noted other forces were at play that connect with external linkages, the global transformations sweeping the globe since 1960s and 1970s and these changes "have propelled gentrification from a comparatively marginal preoccupation in a certain niche of the real estate industry to the cutting edge of urban change" (1996:8).[76] Although Smith was aware that gentrification in different parts of the world were diverse processes with specific economic and cultural conditions, nonetheless, gentrification is a significant component of urbanism anywhere in the world (Smith 2002:439) and many cities around the world have adopted "a broadly conceived gentrification of old centers as a competitive urban strategy in the global market…In this respect, at least, turn-of-the-century neoliberalism hints at a thread of convergence between urban experiences in the larger cities of what used to be called the First and Third Worlds." (441).

In the past five years since Bashar Asad came to power after the death of his father, the Syrian government had tried to reverse a stagnant economy and slowly incorporate within an increasingly competitive global economy.[77] According to Smith this competition is increasingly defined with "the marketing of cities as residential and

[76] See Sassen (1991).
[77] Law 10 is meant to encourage investment by both local and foreign entities by offering such things as tax and export incentives. See Boustany (1992).

tourist destinations" (2002:447). Thus the minister of tourism in Syria can extol the virtues of investment in the Old City to attract tourists.[78] Gentrification which combined local real estate developers and investors with global financial markets met with the support of the government (Smith 2002:443). This was one way Syria could integrate into the world economy and slowly emerge from decades of isolation.

While such concepts as gentrification and gentrifier do not have a direct equivalent in Arabic, ʻstthmār and mustathmir come close. However, the negative connotations that such terms elicit in the US are not associated with mustathmir and ʻstthmār in Syria by many locals.[79] The terms remain, for the present, a neutral concept perhaps because for many including the locals, they see this group of investors as fleeting. Part of the reason can be the volatile political situation that could dissuade investors at any time. Furthermore, this form of investment in the Old city is a relatively new phenomena taking place only within the past ten years. Thus the impact and the long-term manifestations of this investment are not yet readily apparent to the long-term inhabitants. For the time being most locals do not condemn restaurants in their neighborhoods and welcome the changes they have brought to the neighborhood.

Piece of Heaven on Earth

Ali was not just making a good business decision when he purchased the bayt ʻarabī. The aesthetic qualities of the courtyard house were important elements in its

[78] In an interview with the Wall Street Journal in 2005 he states that tourism to Syria has increased by 50% in 2004. See Sovich (2005).
[79] See Hartigan (1999), Davila (2004), Jackson (2002) on the negative connotations of gentrification and gentrifier in the US.

popularity with both investors and locals. The guests at his party around the fountain sensed this. Ali found great happiness in a bayt ʻarabī "because it is the space that is comforting for the soul. I feel relaxed. It is a feeling I own a piece of land and sky." He was convinced his work will develop in such an environment. In addition he was living in history and according to him "the artist is the one most protective of the real form of Damascus." By the real form he meant maintaining the layout of a bayt ʻarabī. The bayt which he owned had adapted well to his idea of gallery and studio with minimal changes or alternations to the physical structure.

Locals were also proud of their courtyard houses and were aware of their intrinsic aesthetic and commercial value. The courtyard can overwhelm the senses and the sound of the water in the fountain can be soothing. People think of the Old City as a place with certain sounds and smells that trigger memories. Many want to come and sit in courtyards amidst the jasmine, roses, and citrus trees because it is relaxing.

Um Kamel insisted I go with her to see the room of Nahla her neighbor's married sister. We started early one morning to catch the sister home before she went out shopping or visiting. We arrived as Nahla was busy setting out breakfast for her guests. Nahla's friend and children who lived in a basement apartment in Qassa', outside Bab Touma, had come to have breakfast in the courtyard amidst the plants and trees in the bright spring sunshine. The friend told me that her apartment was dark and she liked to come here when the weather was nice to sit outside in the courtyard. Nahla added that many people love to visit her in the spring and summer because of the courtyard and then she joked "They stay away in winter."

It was a nice courtyard, with a big fountain in the middle and where Nahla had the three rooms that constituted her house, were potted plants and trees. The entire house had been rented several years ago by her in-laws, and now various descendents were living there taking over several rooms and calling them home. The room I had come to see was closed since it was in the part of the house that belonged to her husband's nephew and he and his family were out for the day. But sitting in the courtyard with the children talking and laughing made me understand why the courtyard was the place for socializing. It was open yet closed, no one could just wonder in, but as one German woman told me "you can be outside without really being outside." A gentle breeze was blowing that day and we were sitting in the shade on flagstones that were still wet from the morning cleaning and as they dried they gave off a cooling effect. We were sheltered from the hot sun but whose warmth we could feel as it was reflected from the white flagstones just where shade and sun met.

It was the courtyard that brought people together especially in the warm weather when flat dwellers are sweltering in the heat or cooped up in air conditioned rooms that residents of a bayt ʻarabī felt the most pride in their homes. Even the smallest courtyard could seat more people than any room. Children could run about, different activities that would dirty the kitchen or indoor rooms such as eating, shelling peas, and fava beans, or coring squash and stuffing them with rice and meat were done here. Anyone could come in dirty and tired and find a place to sit. Indoors would be a different matter you have to take off your shoes. Thus in many ways the courtyard could keep the rooms clean if most activities took place in the open space. Nahla was proud of her courtyard and how it

brought people together. Though she was living with her extended family, she was on good terms with them and she did not mind the work it took to keep the courtyard clean. It meant her rooms stayed cleaner longer.

"All I Dream of is a *Ṭābiq* (Flat)"

> Ali had a cosmopolitan perception of the locals in the Old City. He believed that: Some people want to keep it residential but it presents issues of cleaning for women. Women prefer ṭābiq. There is no contradiction between a city museum and people living here because it completes humans and the aesthetic side has to see beauty in order to see the value of the house his city. The city is dying they [referring to locals] prefer apartments and if this continues the city will certainly die.

Salim the architect I introduced in Chapter Four had a similar response and considered that the people who lived there now were not the real protectors of the city. It is not just women who want to move to a ṭābiq. To move indicates a form of modernity:

> Those who used to live in an old house became disgusted, they no longer were aware of it, and they have all the right not to. They go to a flat with three rooms, a bath and kitchen. The upkeep is easier. Here you have a house that needs more work…So all people left for modern buildings…. Life has changed. Old life is not like new life …Now you notice in your

fieldwork everyone says they do not want to live in a bayt ʿarabī, they want to live in a ṭābiq.

The relationship of locals with the Old City and the bayt ʿarabī was a complex one in light of the changes that were taking place in the neighborhoods. Both Ali and Salim were right to suggest that locals want to move from a courtyard house to a ṭābiq. However it was largely contingent on whether locals were owners or tenants in a courtyard house, as well as the condition of the house they lived in. It also had to do with their own interpretation of modernity and what it entailed. Ali was correct, to a certain degree, in his assessment that some women preferred not to live in a bayt ʿarabī because of the difficulty of keeping it clean. However, it was more complicated than wanting a clean house and had to do with the woman's economic status which in turn determined whether she owned or rented.

Many of the Syrians I encountered in the Old City were renting rooms in a bayt ʿarabī. Many of them were young couples and families who were saving to buy their own ṭābiq. Though there may be those who wanted to purchase their own bayt ʿarabī, the people I knew renting in the Old City spoke only of owning a ṭābiq. In many regards their situation is similar to an earlier generation of shwām who left the Old City in the middle of the twentieth century for modern apartments. The concept among some inhabitants of the Old City remained that social mobility was tantamount to moving into an apartment in a new neighborhood of the city, preferably one that they purchased.

This was made even more pertinent by the unmodern houses they were renting. The contrast between what it meant to be modern or not was visible daily in the home. Many lived in houses that lacked conveniences such as bathrooms and kitchens. Landlords were less accommodating to the needs of their tenants and did not make necessary repair or keep up with routine maintenance. In some instance they did not mediate between tenants when conflicts arose such as over the use of space or from high electricity or water bills. Utilities were usually on one meter and landlords did not pay to have each tenant on a separate one. It was situations as these that led many locals to be disgusted with the houses in which they lived. These details are usually missing from the analysis of cosmopolitans as to why locals want to leave a bayt ʻarabī for a ṭābiq.

Nora lived in a bayt ʻarabī in one big room that was divided by a curtain into two sections. In the outer room, with the front door that opened onto the courtyard, she had set up the living room with the TV, the main entertainment source for many locals. In the inner section she had the sleeping space with a bed, vanity table, and wardrobe. She slept with her husband and two little children in this room. Across the courtyard opposite the front door was her kitchen with one water tap, cold, stove top, and refrigerator. Her family shared a Turkish toilet with one of the neighbors. It was located off the corridor that led from the alley into the courtyard. Nora and her family did not have a bathroom and they bathed and washed in the kitchen heating water on the stove.

The bayt ʻarabī where Nora lived, once housed one family but had since been partitioned and rented to several others. Currently five different families lived on the

ground floor and three or four on the second level. The relationships with the neighbors became challenging and required Nora to carefully negotiate the space with the other families, especially when it came to the courtyard, which she shared with five other families. To get to the bathroom or kitchen Nora and her family had to cross the courtyard in front of the other families. The courtyard was also used as the passageway for two of the families who lived on the second story. During my fieldwork there was constant fighting among the neighbors over whether the children could play in the courtyard or not. Nora tried to maintain good relations with the neighbors to make life bearable in such close quarters.

She also complained how she had no privacy in her house and could not wear shorts because she always had to go through the courtyard to get to either the kitchen or toilet and was constantly under the gaze of her neighbors. Nora's complaints were about the lack of control she had over her domestic life. Her neighbors knew when she went to the bathroom, when she bathed, what she cooked and when, who came to visit, etc. Of course living in such close quarters also meant Nora knew everything about her neighbors as well. However, Nora was not as interested in her neighbors' lives as they seemed to be interested in hers.

Nadia Khost explained to me how women in the bayt ʻarabī were in control of the space "the house was the woman's house. The man was a guest in it." Bourdieu's seminal work on the Berber house argued how the male and female use of the domestic space was an inversion of the social order that existed in the world beyond the threshold (Bourdieu 2003). However, in both of these instances the woman owned, or at least her

husband did the house. The bayt ʿarabī as the woman's domain remains an issue of class. Nora's husband worked outside and only came home for lunch followed by a siesta and in the evening. This left her home most of the day alone with the neighbors. They were more of an issue for her than for her husband, since she was in constant contact with them. As a matter of fact, her husband was able to maintain polite formal relations with the neighbors even when his wife was not on speaking terms with them. He would say "this is *shughal niswan*" or women's business to fight one day and make up the next. He was not going to follow his wife's lead and have social interactions with the neighbors only when she did. When it came to status in the bayta'arabī, women like Nora did not dominant nor control their domestic space.

Nora was looking forward to the day when she would move to her ṭābiq where she hoped she will be in control of her domestic space. "It is much better in a ṭābiq. It is easier to keep clean, you can maintain your privacy, you do not have to associate with the neighbors, and you may never see your neighbors." She went on to say how she could not wait for the winter so she could close her door and gather her children around her and have nothing to do with the neighbors in the courtyard. Unfortunately it was not financially feasible for Nora to move to a flat. Her husband could barely make ends meet in this house and moving would add to their financial difficulties.

The dream of a ṭābiq was more than escaping meddlesome neighbors. It was also a dream of social mobility for Nora and her family. Since they had been living in the Old City before it became fashionable to move there they still maintained the notion that

moving out was an improvement on their current situation. This notion was reinforced by the living conditions in houses that did not provide the tenants with a decent life. The Turkish toilet, no bathroom, one tap of cold water, the meddlesome neighbors bespeak of an unmodern lifestyle. Nora had been exposed to life in flats from her family and friends who have moved as well as from TV. For many who lived in the Old City to move was an indication to family, friends, and neighbors that they had made it financially.

Many people were embarrassed by their bayt ʿarabī, if it was run down and difficult to keep clean. It did not match their outward appearance in dress and behavior like a ṭābiq would. Some could be apologetic about visitors coming to dirty, cockroach infested alleys and lanes to houses that smelled damp. As mentioned earlier, Nora told me how she felt honored when her uncles who lived in flats in the new neighborhoods came and visited her. She considered her house beneath her wealthier relatives and was at pains to make them welcome when they did come. Her situation and relation with the bayt ʿarabī contrasted sharply with that of Ali. He was proud of his bayt ʿarabī and wanted to display it as much as his art work. He had the financial means to make it a comfortable space for work. Economic status is an important determinant when it comes to the relationship with the bayt ʿarabī however, it is also about the belief that the bayt ʿarabī is heritage. Ali could have opened an art gallery in any other part of Damascus. He had the financial resources to do so, but he chose the bayt ʿarabī because of its aesthetic and historical qualities. If Nora attained the financial means to decide where she wanted to live, she will opt to move to a ṭābiq than stay in a bayt ʿarabī.

Nora was aware of the condition of her living space. As a tenant she had limited control over the house she did not own or the kind of neighbors she had to live with. Her ability to improve her living conditions was severely hampered by her status as tenant in the Old City. When we went to one of the new restaurants that had opened in the Old City, she looked at the lush new surroundings that were as different from her courtyard house as night and day and said, "Khay! Now we pay to enter a bayt ʻarabī." Her surprise was also at how a vernacular structure that had been decried as unmodern and in her experience was could become the new trope of modernity. She did not see the restaurant as heritage or traditional. It was for her as for many a very modern establishment.

The restaurants are a new consumption trend in Syria.[80] The surprise of Nora was to see houses become valuable commodities and how money was able to transform them. For Nora and her family however, to be modern was not to own a house in the Old City. As a local, her belief of upward mobility would be to purchase an apartment in one of the new suburbs. To buy and fix a house in the Old City would not be considered an improvement on her current situation. Her intimate knowledge of life in a bayt ʻarabī informed her that fixing a crumbling courtyard house was a constant battle especially with the preservation laws that insisted traditional material be used. Thus in many ways the preservation of the city might lead to its depopulation because unless the house was used for some kind of profit venture, its maintenance can be costly for those without the

[80]See Salamandra (2004) on this who deals in great detail with the consumption aspects of restaurants in the Old City and beyond.

financial means. Therefore when cosmopolitans indicate that people did not want to live in the Old City they were to a certain extent correct.

Though flats in some neighborhoods could be in worse conditions, the discourse among Syrians in general remained that the Old City was a dirty backward place, as I have illustrated in Chapter Four. I remembered a particular incident about a friend of my landlady's daughter coming to visit who lived in a new neighborhood in a spacious flat. I was on my way out but before I reached the landing I heard a woman scream and saw the friend run through the corridor into the living room. I continued on my way and asked my landlady on the door what the matter was. She told me she saw a cockroach and then added "as though there are no cockroaches anywhere else in the city."

Keeping the bayt ʿarabī clean is another theme about why these houses are not suitable for modern life and women. Take for example the story of Khadra and her family. She lived in a modest sized bayt ʿarabī. She had three rooms around the courtyard and three rooms on the second level. It was now very suitable for her and her five children. But this was not always the case. There was a time when she was living with her in-laws, two brother in-laws, and their families. Needless to say, the house was very crowded and difficult to keep clean. For one thing the women never agreed on whose turn it was to clean and since they did not get along with one another they did not want to clean together. Now that her parents-in-law had passed away and her brothers-in-law have moved out she has the entire house to her own though she did not own it entirely. One of her unmarried daughters who did not have a job spent most of her time keeping the courtyard and rooms clean. During the summer the daughter washed the

courtyard three times a day. Though this was an extreme by many standards, it does highlight how difficult it was to keep a courtyard house clean. When the daughter does marry and move away, Khadra most likely would have a difficult time keeping the house clean, a situation that might lead her to decide if she wanted to stay in the house or move to a ṭābiq.

"What More Do I Need"

Notwithstanding the story of Nora and her dream to move to a ṭābiq, there were locals who were engaged in attempts to improve their living conditions and their neighborhoods. It was the difference between being owners and renters which was glossed over in official discourses on the Old City and by cosmopolitans who believed that everyone who lived there had the desire to move. Owners especially if they possessed the financial means actually wanted to modernize and improve their bayt ʻarabī. However, their attempts at modernizing their houses were not always seen as improvements by officials and cosmopolitans. Officials considered these attempts in violation of the laws to preserve the Old City, as we will see in Chapter Six.

"What more do I need?" Abu Sami asked rhetorically staring down on me and pointing to the corner. I followed his extended arm to where a fountain was gurgling in the corner of his truncated courtyard. "At night I sit out here and turn on the fountain. The sound of water, the sky above my head. This is heaven." Later Abu George who also lived in a bayt ʻarabī added: "There is nothing like a bayt ʻarabī. It is a man's castle.

I don't have to worry about my neighbors. In a ṭābiq I do not own the roof, or floor, only the four walls and just barely. No you cannot compare a flat to a bayt ʻarabī."

As owners both Abu Sami and Abu George experienced the bayt ʻarabī differently than Nora who shared a house with several other tenants. The elderly men valued their privacy in a bayt ʻarabī that Nora did not have in hers. In their opinion living in ṭābiq entailed more contact with neighbors than living in a courtyard house. The different experiences of people who lived in a bayt ʻarabī were essential to illustrate the various reasons of why people chose to stay or leave.

It was interesting to finally see Abu Sami's house. I had wanted to see it ever since one of my friends had talked about it as a possible rental for my advisor and her family during their visit to Damascus. "It is only for a month," I said, "but it would be nice if they can live in the Old City. But it needs to be a house and not a room." It was then that my friend told me about the house of Abu Sami in Haret Hanania. He explained how much money Abu Sami spent on the house to make it nice and comfortable. I later discovered that it was a section of courtyard house that once belonged to Abu Sami's father but now was divided among three brothers. This part belonged to a brother who decided to move out of the Old City. Instead of selling to someone outside the family, he sold to Abu Sami the three rooms on the lower level. Abu Sami had his share on the second level. The three rooms were refurbished and Abu Sami and his wife used them instead of their rooms on the upper level. Abu Sami eventually decided he did not want to rent.

Nonetheless, I wanted to see the rooms but it took much effort to convince Abu Sami to allow me to visit. It was not until months later that he invited me to come and visit his wife. So I went expecting to see one of the refurbished courtyard houses that I had seen in different parts of the city where the elements of the bayt ʻarabī courtyard, fountain, iwan and qa'ah were restored to their original plan. I walked through the outer door into a truncated courtyard. Abu Sami's other brother who also lived in the house had built a room using modern material in the courtyard. Abu Sami's house was beyond this room in what had remained from the courtyard. The courtyard was tiled covering the black and white flagstones, and in the corner was a water fountain that worked on electricity. In front of me I could make out the iwan that was sealed and divided into two levels. Inside the house I could not tell if I was in a courtyard house or an apartment. It was thoroughly remodeled to resemble a ṭābiq. The room next to the iwan was converted into a dining room through which one could get to the kitchen and bathroom and through another door to the living room that opened onto the courtyard. It was nothing what a courtyard house should look like. The historic elements were removed for more modern ones and I found myself to be disappointed.

It was then that I realized that I have internalized the discourse of many cosmopolitans that the houses in the Old City are heritage and that people who live in them are ruining them with their renovations. It became apparent to me standing in Abu Sami's courtyard that locals had different perceptions of aesthetics and beauty in a bayt ʻarabī. Abu Sami was in his castle, even though he had to share it with his brother's

family. It was where he as born, raised, married and reared his own family. It was enough for him to sit in the courtyard, turn on the fountain, look up at his little patch of sky and be happy. Since it was his house he felt entitled to do what he pleased. His definition of modernity was to seal and divide the iwan, connect the rooms internally and build a bathroom and kitchen inside. He had the means to make his house comfortable regardless of the preservation guidelines.

Figure 10: Sealed Iwan

“People Ruin Homes”

Cosmopolitans prefer not to purchase houses like Abu Sami’s. It would be expensive to undo what Abu Sami and his brothers had done and reinstate the original elements of the house. One cosmopolitan couple spent two years looking for a house in the Old City to purchase. They were looking for a house in its most pristine condition but with the essential elements, courtyard, fountain, iwan, and flanking halls still present. They eventually found one that was abandoned for several decades where the roof had collapsed but it was what they wanted. They were not sure if they wanted to live in it or not but they wanted to fix it up as they saw fit. I asked the woman why it took them this long to find a house. She replied that “People living in houses ruin them” and thus they were seeking a house that had undergone the least amount of modification in the name of the local’s idea of modernization. What Abu Sami had done to his house to make it comfortable and modern is considered by some cosmopolitans as ruining the bayt ʿarabī. The modernity of Abu Sami clashed with the modernity of the cosmopolitan couple. The couple was interested in a house that was in a derelict state where they could display their skills in the preservation and restoration of a heritage house.

The couple would emphasize the history and heritage of the house. The husband showed me thin terra cotta tiles in the wall that had been stripped of paint and plaster and said “Roman tiles.” In the gutted courtyard he pointed to terra cotta pipes and talked about “Roman aqueducts” and how he wanted to install glass bricks over them so they could be exhibited. As Suhail who had been living in the Old City his entire life told me “anyone who now buys in the Old City is respected. Twenty years ago anyone living in

the Old City was considered poor." They were considered poor he explained to me because "they did not have money to buy a ṭābiq. Now things have changed. Now for those who are living here [in the Old City] are considered fortunate." However, there was a difference in how people should be living there. Their houses should correspond to the ideal of a bayt ʿarabī with the historical elements clearly defined and not be completely redone.

Abu Sami was not interested in the history or heritage of his house. He was interested in making it comfortable for his daily needs it was his home and not an object of display. The fact that it took me several months to actually see the house could be attributed in part to Abu Sami's cantankerous nature, but I also believed that he was not comfortable with the idea of this house as an object on display. It infringed on his privacy and the sanctity of his house. On the other hand, the cosmopolitan couple was seeking to highlight certain elements in the building material of their house to stress its historical value. "Display is an interface that mediates and thereby transforms what is shown into heritage…Not only does the heritage production have its own history *as* a heritage production, but the display interface…is a critical site for conveying meanings other than the message of heritage" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998:7-8).

Abu Sami may not be involved in the modernity project as defined by cosmopolitans and who in turn are implementing state policy, yet he believes that he is leading a modern lifestyle. Locals who lived in the Old City with its winding alleys and courtyard houses and who were owners like Abu Sami with the financial resources were

able to improve on the house and introduce modern conveniences. For the locals, including Abu Sami's neighbors, they saw his house as an improvement because he had fixed it up but still lived in it. Although Abu Sami had the money to convert his house into a restaurant he did not choose to do so because that was not his main relationship with his house and neighborhood. It was home. Thus he could plaster over the roman tiles if they existed and cut the iwan into two levels and create two rooms where there was one. He could add a modern kitchen and bathroom and a little fountain in the corner that he turned on with an electric switch much to the chagrin of the cosmopolitans.

Locals Investing in *Bayt 'Arabī*

Locals had been involved in investing in the Old City long before it became fashionable to do so by the cosmopolitans. Owners of houses had leased rooms to supplement their income.[81] It was their form of investment in the bayt 'arabī. The importance of rent was exemplified in the case of an elderly couple who also lived in the neighborhood of Nora in a courtyard house they purchased over 30 years ago.

The couple's bayt 'arabī was simple, a courtyard, and no fountain or plants, with rooms around it. The house perhaps never had an iwan since I could not discern the outlines of one. They had several rooms which they divided among themselves and their two married sons. Each son had made modifications to their share of rooms to make them as comfortable as possible for their families. The son upstairs with whom I visited had installed a modern bathroom and kitchen on what was once a balcony. There were

[81] See (Herzfeld 1991) for a similar practice by residents of a historic Greek village on the island of Crete.

also three additional rooms that the couple rented out to soldiers or students. The rent money was a big part of their income since the husband's pension was not large.

One day the husband came home having made initial plans to sell the house. With the money he was able to obtain for the house he would be able to purchase three flats, for him and his wife, and for each of his sons. The price of this courtyard house in the Old City was equivalent to three apartments in a new suburb of Damascus. However, his wife was upset with his plan to sell and refused to allow him to go forth with the deal. It was a very practical matter for her. How will they live if they no longer had the rent money? Apartments did not lend themselves easily to leasing like the courtyard houses. Finally the family remained in the Old City.

Hala, a woman in her late 40s, had lost her parents a few years before I met her. She had three brothers who were married. They either lived outside the Old City or have immigrated. She had not married and remained in the family home, a small bayt ʻarabī with a truncated courtyard with three rooms on the first level and four on the second floor. It was a small house but still large for one person alone so she rented the rooms on the second floor. When I walked through the front door I saw the remains of the iwan on my right but instead of facing an open courtyard it faced a wall that separated her from the neighbors. In front of me were stairs that led to where my friend had her room. Martina was a German student whom I met through a mutual friend and she introduced me to Hala. Martina and I turned out to be "neighbors" since we shared a wall.

[83] Many Syrians prefer to rent to foreigners especially westerners because they pay more and do not stay for extended periods of time.

When Martina knew about my research she told me about her landlady Hala and whom she thought would be an interesting person to interview and that was how I was standing in Hala's tiny courtyard. The first time I went to interview Hala she had company and was busy entertaining. She introduced me as the researcher living in Um Tariq's house and since her visitors were also her neighbors as well they all knew my landlady. I sat politely for a few minutes than excused myself and told Hala I will come back another day. Martina told me she was always having visitors. When I went to see her the second time I could hear the sound of gushing water as I stood outside the black iron door. She opened the door after I rang the door bell with a hose in her hand. The courtyard behind her was flooded. Though it was in the afternoon she was cleaning. I later found out she worked in a government office in the morning and she only had time to clean in the afternoon. She insisted I come in and as I waited in the enclosed iwan that became a sitting room she turned off the running water.

She told me that she had lived in this house for over 40 years and knew all the neighbors "they can always be called on to help in times of need. We laugh together and cry together. If I say "Ouch" hundreds rush to my aide." She preferred the bayt ʿarabī to a ṭābiq. It was more spacious besides she was used to life in the Old City and this house. It would be difficult for her to move, though she did say it required a lot of work to keep the house clean. She did some changes to the house. She closed off the iwan and made it into an extra room. Now she had three rooms with a kitchen and bathroom on the lower level connected.

The upper level was built when her brothers were growing up and needed their own space so they added room after room surreptitiously since it was illegal to alter courtyard houses in the intramural city. For the past six or seven years she started renting rooms to foreign students. Male or female, as long as they were foreign.[83] She let the word out to neighbors, grocers, other families who also leased rooms. There was an informal network of people with extra rooms that they rented out and they kept each other informed of possible tenants.[84]

This form of practice where locals rent to foreigners is also leading to new ways of thinking about gender relations in the Old City. Martina told me that Hind was "ok" about boyfriends spending the night as long as it was one boyfriend and that there were no problems between the couple. Many of the people who rented rooms were aware that foreigners had different customs but some refused and insisted that boyfriends or girlfriends could not spend the night. I heard of one instance where a Syrian boyfriend was not allowed to visit but a foreign one could. In most of these cases the issue was to preempt any problems with the neighbors and in the neighborhood. Syrians even the young ones were aware that they could not duplicate a western lifestyle as foreigners. This indicated that the locals were not entrenched in an unmodern backward mentality but were able to negotiate what was acceptable for foreigners and what did not work for Syrians. In this environment where they depended on Western students for rent made

[84] Although she said she rents to both men and women, Hala preferred to rent to women. There was the common perception that females were safer as tenants than males.

them accommodate certain attitudes and practices that they may otherwise not agree to. They were practicing their own form of cultural relativism.

The example of the elderly couple and Hala indicates how locals were investing in their bayt ʻarabī although not at the same scale as cosmopolitans. This investment in turn is changing their practices as well as their beliefs and attitudes about certain things such as gender relations. Their investment as in the case of Hala who rented to foreigners indicated that locals are in tune with global trends and ideas yet they always place them within the context of the local. Hala may allow her tenants sexual freedom that she may not allow a Syrian one. Furthermore since these owners were from the neighborhood and had been living there for several decades, their relationship with the neighborhood was also different. Hala relied on her neighbors for assistance, support, and company. The Old City was home. She shared the same feelings towards her home as Abu Sami. Locals who were under no compelling reason to sell and move remained in the Old City and would like to remain there. For the time being they are able to do so.

As I mentioned earlier locals who owned property and lived in the Old City selling to an investor becomes a moral issue. For many conscientious owners they take into consideration the needs of their neighbors. For example Abu Sami's brother sold him his house instead of someone unrelated. Before cosmopolitans began purchasing property in the Old City more effort was made to sell homes to people who fit in with the neighborhood makeup and met with the neighbors' approval. Thus many neighborhoods in the Old City maintained their sectarian composition. However, this is changing as the Old City becomes more popular with investors. The opening of new restaurants, hotels,

and art galleries is creating a new dynamic in the neighborhood whose impact remains to be seen.

Conclusion

The unique built environment and the history of Damascus made it an ideal site for tourist establishments. For many countries "especially those marginalized in the global industrial and information economy-tourist development may seem to offer the only hope of survival in the global era" (Alsayyad 2001:1). In this chapter I have contrasted how locals challenged discourses that the Old City is in state of decline and needed mustathmirīn to revive it by showing how they are involved in their own investment patterns. Though some locals seek to move out in the quest for social mobility and owning a ṭābiq others have made their homes comfortable in the local sense and some have even converted their courtyard houses into income generating projects either by renting to locals or foreigners.

Integration into the world economy has taken on additional significance in the current geopolitical situation where Syria cannot afford political isolation. The government is focusing on creating an environment suitable for investment by Syrians and foreigners in the built environment of the Old City. Through gentrification and the marketing of Damascus as a site of heritage Syria is demonstrating not only its willingness to engage with the global economy but also that it is a site of an ancient civilization. Cradles of civilization do not breed terrorist. Furthermore, interaction with

westerners is leading to new ways of thinking about gender relations that can be placed within the context of the local.

Homes are currently purchased by cosmopolitan investors who transform them into non-habitat use initially as restaurants and increasingly as hotels and art galleries. Many of the investors see this as preserving the Old City since and as I stated in the previous chapter there is a growing discourse that many people cannot live in the houses of the Old City, though they had for centuries. Arguments made for their incompatibility with modern life include that houses are too expensive to maintain and people prefer to live in a ṭābiq. But this also has to do with different perceptions on what preservation means to locals and cosmopolitans, the topic of the next chapter.

Chapter Six: "The Problem with the Old City It Is Too Alive:" Preserving the Living

This chapter explores how discourses of *aṣl* (origin) and *aṣāla* (authenticity) are put into different practices by both cosmopolitans and locals. The different ṭabaqāt of discourses lead to different interpretations and in turn to different approaches to historic preservation. Although there are official guidelines and regulations on how preservation of the vernacular buildings should be done, many of the private entities restoring houses see them as an obstacle to the maintenance of the Old City rather than guiding principle. Therefore, I will also discuss the official stance on historic preservation and how it both hinders and assists the work of locals and cosmopolitans. My aim here is not to demonstrate how preservation is implemented but to argue that preservation efforts are challenged by the fact that the city remains a thriving residential and commercial center. Historic preservation when implemented in such areas faces additional challenges from the people who live and work there. Policy that does not take residents into consideration remains impractical and contradictory. This has become a pressing issue as preservation has shifted from monuments to vernacular architecture thereby directly affecting the social aspects of the Old City.

The official position of the government states that the Old City is a heritage site in its entirety and needs not only to be protected but preserved. As one administrator indicated "the preservation of cities is part of the world heritage... Preservation of heritage is an international law to protect human heritage. Preservation and renovation

has political dimensions. The city is identity, both national and personal. If it is lost a way of life is lost." Yet there is no consistent policy on how this should be done that takes into account the residents of the Old City. The same administrator admitted that social and cultural aspects are missing from the government's preservation project. Yet in their efforts to restore houses and transform them into restaurants, mustathmirīn cannot ignore the social and cultural aspects. I will examine how they negotiate them in their historic preservation projects.

Of Aṣl and Other Things

Aṣl underscores the historic preservation of many buildings in the Old City. According to the then director of the Committee for the Protection of Old Damascus:

> In its basic form "preservation is *tarjī' al-bayt ila al-* aṣl (to reinstate the house to its aṣl). If we include the innovations, the old and unique urban fabric of the city disappears. Its [the Old City] importance stems from being old.

He was referring to Section 2 from the legislation that defined the parameters of historic restoration in the intramural city. This law emphasized the French cadastral plans, mentioned in Chapter Two, and the years 1926-1927 when they were drawn as the "original" description for real estate. This plan established the layout, width and height of buildings in the Old City. Thus the aṣl that the director spoke of was based on these plans.

The law also considered the year 1948 as the latest dates any additions to the house may be kept. Anything added to the building after 1948, ideally, had to be removed and the current real estate must conform as much as possible to the cadastral map. This included the preservation of open spaces such as the courtyards and rooms with doors and windows as they appear in the plan.

The cadastral plans suggest an elusive aṣāla that was supposedly documented by the French. They are considered by Syrian officials thorough, exact, as well as a modern documentation of the Old City. The cadastral plans were drawn by the French in their colonial enterprise to impose control over and order in Syria. Although, the maps were considered exceptional in their detail, as colonial documents they went unchallenged in the modern independent Syria and assumed a neutrality as factual historical documents. Furthermore, the current use of the maps does not take into consideration the constant evolution of the city as well as the built environment. Though currently Syria had been independent for several decades, it had not "decolonized" its representation of the Old City.

Scott reported that decolonization had not taken place with the liberation movements that swept the colonized world (1999). Politically many of these countries achieved independence but:

> What was not theorized (or anyway what remained undertheorized) in this space of anticoloniality-and this not because the anticolonial nationalist were simple-minded essentialists, but because it had not yet become

> visible as *the* question of moment-was the whole question of the *decolonization of representation* itself, the decolonization of the conceptual apparatus through which their political objectives were thought out. (Scott 1999:12 emphasis in original)

The asl that had become the aim of any preservation project in the Old City was based on a colonial representation that had not been contested by the nation state. The assumption remained that since these plans were drawn by the "modern" French using modern techniques and scientific methods, they were not part of the colonial project but rather universal in their aim and application. As a matter of fact in none of my discussions with any officials or architects did they voice any objection to these maps. When I asked about using colonial forms of representations in a decidedly national project, one answer I got was that this form of documentation was factual. There can be no tampering with them. Granted, the French most likely than not did document what they saw, but the fact that they saw it with the colonial "gaze" remained unchallenged.

This remained one of the fascinating issues in the historical preservation project in the Old City where orientalist and local representations of history and heritage conflated. It became problematic for an anthropologist like me trained in the critic of colonial discourse to encounter former colonial subjects not perturbed by the matter. What did it indicate when local representations of themselves, under the guise of self-representation, equated and approximated colonial and orientalist representations? Scott might caution anthropologist to be aware of the "conceptual-ideological *formation* of the objects that

constitute its discourse" so as not to replicate the colonial discourse (Scott 1999:13) but what happened when the Syrians themselves did?

One approach was to think of the above as tactical practice. By adopting western, colonial, and orientalist representation Syrians were involved in the same modernity discourse as in the West. This did not preclude the fact that some might actually agree with such a representation. However, as a tactical strategy the assumption was if they could think as the west, they were not that different. Although decolonization might be an alterative, it was a risky course to take for a country that was already portrayed as a rogue and terrorist sponsoring regime. Syria's international image had deteriorated over the course of the past several years. In the process it had lost many of its usual allies such as France. The official rhetoric of the regime might speak of resistance to the west but the government was initiating a cultural dialogue.

Over the course of my field work several architects and officials insisted that I should tell "them," and by them they meant my American professors and in turn American readership, about how houses were built in the Old City. Syrians were not interested in my imparting the exact details of construction in Damascus but what this construction entailed, a sophisticated and ingenious respond to the ecology and climate of Damascus. As one person said to me these houses dealt with the spiritual, environmental, and material needs of people. Such a civilization that is able to produce this kind of architecture could not be relegated to a role on the world stage as terrorists and outside the mainstream of humanity. Thus an anti-colonial discourse with its emphasis on decolonization is not a wise option at this point in time and place.

In his discussion of cultural authenticity Al-Azmeh considered such discourse as aṣl and aṣāla "predicated on the notion of a historical subject which is at once self-sufficient and self-evident. Its discourse is consequently an essentialist discourse, much like the reverse it finds in Orientalism, in discourses on the primitive, and in other discourses on cultural otherness" (Al-Azmeh 1993:42). Thus notions of aṣl and aṣāla are embedded in what is considered to be modern and is for the most part in dialogue in response to the West. This seems to be the case in situations where western economic and political hegemony has led to "correlative conditions of equally real ideological and cultural hegemony" (39). It seems that the non-west remains for the most part in dialogue with the west even in discourses of tradition and authenticity.

Aṣāla is an interesting term in Arabic:

> Lexically, it indicates salutary moral qualities like loyalty, nobility, and a sense of commitment to a specific social group or set of values. It also indicates a sense of *sui generis* originality; and in association with the sense previously mentioned, aṣāla specifically refers to genealogical standing: noble or at least respectable descent for humans, and the status of equine aristocrats (Al-Azmeh 1993:41).

Of horses and houses aṣl remained important in the historic preservation projects because of its "aura" (Mufti 2000). Mufti, taking his cue from Walter Benjamin, talked about how some cultural practices possessing a "kind of aura, as the practices themselves came to be seen as resources for the overcoming the

forms of alienation that were the result, and the subjective dimension, of the colonial encounter" (Mufti 2000:87-88). He saw the process of decolonization as restoring the aura to tradition. However, giving traditions an aura was not a process of decolonization rather, as Al-Azmeh noted, was maintaining the distinction of what it means to be modern and traditional as set forth by the colonial power. The process of decolonization that Scott had advocated is still not taking place. The dichotomy of these terms or discourses was never challenged and the aura of tradition masked this fact (Mufti 2000).

For Al-Azmeh and Mufti, issues of authenticity and modernity remained an intellectual discourse. What was missing from their work on modernity and tradition was that there are people who were negotiating their own modernity and tradition through their daily practices. The locals were not interested in the debate or discourse of aṣl or modernity but in making ends meet. As officials and intellectuals might be debating the meaning of historic preservation and aṣl, locals were fixing their houses as they deemed fit and in the process preserving them as they saw fit. Locals did so not because they had no pride in their history but because such discourse had no immediate bearing on their present conditions. Thus we see the different ṭabaqāt not only of discourses surrounding modernity and aṣl but how this discourse was interpreted on various levels in practice.

Aṣl itself is suspect since authenticity remains an evasive concept defined by each generation to suit its purposes. Nonetheless, it is the removing of these "ṭabaqāt of

modernization" to get to the aṣl that leads to a further understanding of the forces at play in the historic preservation projects in the Old City. What is now considered aṣl in a bayt ʻarabī is the courtyard with rooms around it, the first level built of stone, and the second level of mud and straw, a form that we have seen in the previous chapter was not all encompassing but rather belonged to certain socio-economic groups regardless of religious affiliation living within the Old City. What is not considered aṣl in a building are the layers of paint and cement. Furthermore, it is the use of modern cheap, readily available building material such as cement, aluminum for doors and windows, and ceramic tiles. These new building materials are considered not only harmful for the building but bad taste and innovations that should be removed in any preservation project.

Ṭabaqāt of *Aṣl*

As mentioned earlier in the official regulations concerning the historical preservation of the Old City, 1948 is the latest date for any innovations in a building to be considered aṣl. This date is interesting on many ṭabaqāt. First it was the year of war when Israel became an independent state which led to the expulsion of Palestinians from their homes in towns and villages in what now constituted Israel. Many of these refugees found their way to Syria and some settled in the Old City. As discussed earlier, during the late 1940s and 1950s shwām themselves were leaving the Old City to newer neighborhoods and modern apartment buildings. Furthermore throughout the early years

of independence after 1946 a large wave of rural to urban migration took place and many of those villagers found cheap housing in the Old City. Another layer entailed the increase in availability and affordability of cheap building material during this same time period. Thus 1948 as a cut-off point between an authentic past when the Old City was predominantly shwām, serves to mark these different transformations that occurred in the Old City. Most of these transformations were occurring in the name of modernity, the rural-urban migration, the popularity of apartment buildings over the bayt ʻarabī, and the availability of cheap modern building materials.

All these transformations led to new definitions of a bayt ʻarabī, and it is during this period where most of the houses in the Old City were divided using cement walls into several separate units. Such practices are currently thought of as incompatible with the ideal of historic preservation. "Sometimes a house is built in a way and later rooms are added, and you must add a bathroom, kitchen etc [to the new part]. Two brothers disagree and the house is divided. This way [by removing innovations] we revert to the natural form this is tradition" Fikri explained to me. He works with the committee and had become proficient in linking aṣl to tradition in a "spatialized" relationship. To "spatialize" is to "locate, both physically and conceptually, social relations and social practices in social space" (Low 1996b:861).

The aṣl was in the practices of the shwām when they lived in the Old City before the onslaught of modernity in its various forms. Through their spatialized practices they were able to define an Old City that now have become the basis of aṣl. The removal of

layers in the process of restoration also entailed revealing how things were in a sanitized and idealized past before Palestinian refugees and rural migrants flocked to the city. Mustathmirīn market this idealized and sanitized past in their restaurants and hotels and therefore are not only willing partners with the government in its historical preservation projects but its main agents.

One of the main aspects of aṣl in the Old City entailed Al-Azmeh's genealogical dimension with the discourse on the true inhabitants of the Old City as we had seen in Chapter Four and the story of Qusay. The return to a time when the shwām predominately lived in the city was also a return to its early incarnation as an authentic city with authentic courtyard houses. Ironically, many of the mustathmirīn and officials working on the historical preservation of the Old City were not shwām and in some cases not even Syrian. Yet they had accepted the aura of a city of shwām and worked to recreate it. The "aura" of authenticity did blind from certain facts. The current preservation was not spearheaded by shwām entirely yet they evoked the shwām "aura" to garner support for their projects. This became apparent in one meeting with an employee in one of the offices that worked on the preservation of the Old City.

Although non-Syrian, he confided in me how at times he managed to block certain preservation policies by going to his boss, was Syrian but not a shāmī and saying how doing such a thing would increase the ire of the shwām. The employee was evoking the "aura" of the shwām to dissuade his boss from supporting a policy that was not consistent with aṣl according to the employees definition. The employee was aware that

this strategy was deterrent enough for someone who is not a shāmī and who would worry about the ramifications of his actions being considered inauthentic and too innovative. The employee also told me that such a tactic would not work with a shāmī supervisor because as a native of the city the supervisor could claim to know what aṣl was and what it is not. He did not need someone who was not a shāmī to tell him. Shwām had become a trope of identity and beliefs regardless of whether an individual was from the city or not (cf Salamandra 2004).

However, this supposedly return to the aṣl in historic preservation project was completely contradicted by the building of restaurants and hotels in the Old City. The adaptive use entailed structures that did not exist in the original cadastral plan. Officials allowed to a certain degree modifications in a building in order for its rehabilitation as a restaurant or hotel. It was in keeping with the policy to attract investment to the country and to the Old City and therefore the government tended to be relatively lenient since it believed the preservation of the Old City could only be done through private investment. When it came to private residences it tended to be stricter.

Houses, like the people who inhabit them, grow and change overtime. Moreover, they come to reflect their inhabitants and to talk about aṣl can not only be misleading but with many of the modern conveniences that exist in today's world highly impractical. This point was made by the Danish restoration architect Bente Lange who oversaw the process of restoration of Bayt Akkad which eventually became the Danish Institute in the Old City:

> The goal of restoration has been to create a worthy framework where all the various historical periods can co-exist. Talking about what is 'original' makes no sense for a building whose history stretches back for more than 2,000 years. Instead of selecting a favourite period and returning the building to that time, we have tried to let all the architectural layers find expression. Our task has been to liberate the various layers in the building so that each could come into its own while maintaining an overall harmony. A new harmony that had never existed before. A new holism as the expression of our time. (Lange 2003:57)

Many Syrians placed emphasis on aṣl because of what it included in terms of identity and tradition, something many Syrians were quick to point was not readily understood by foreigners. Some Syrians criticized Lange and the Danish Institute for being inauthentic. As Danes they were unable to appreciate the bayt 'arabī, they said and had no reverence for its aura. They insist that they could only appreciate what was aṣl because they were Syrians.

Aṣl was also an abstract quality, a feeling of sorts something you sensed but found it difficult to explain. I think of it as the "Princess and the Pea" syndrome only truly attuned individuals to aṣl of a bayt 'arabī could identify. Nadeem was a young Syrian architect but not a shāmī who spent several years working on Old City architecture. He had worked on the preservation of some houses purchased as residences by Syrians and others. He talked about the "feeling" of a courtyard house. "The bayt

ʿarabī has a soul, when houses are divided the feeling is destroyed. Some material losses its soul, some earlier material like natural wood does not. If I walk into a house where I don't feel this soul I can't work on it."

He acquired the original feel for a house by peeling layers to get to its true period. "In many houses they put new layers on top of old so the level raises and the feel of the courtyard is not correct and doors are squeezed." He knew when to stop with the removal of layers when "I feel that I am going deeper than I should…I feel a certain part is the real part of the architecture." He explained how it was easier for owners to add layers upon layers rather than strip everything and start fresh. This made his job removing these ṭabaqāt cheaper. Historic preservation was the peeling off of layers. "The more you work with old houses the more you appreciate details and you must respect this. You can feel the importance of every small detail and this is not taught in universities." He believed that knowledge comes from the experience of living in the Old City "you have to experience old houses…respect old architecture."

In his search for aṣl Nadeem listened to the house and his experience had taught him what he should be looking for. This removal of layers to reach the level of aṣl entailed going back in time until the add-ons had given way to something considered more authentic. But these ṭabaqāt were also contingent on the condition they were in. He explained that he did add things where needed and he restored the layer best conserved. Sometimes he saw different layers and he worked on the one best preserved. "There is life in the old house, if I treat a wall with cement and treat it with lime it hasn't the same

flavor and feeling of adobe you can feel it. It [house] has a soul. There is something about an old house, mud wall talks about themselves. I can't explain it." In Nadeem's work we can see the different ṭabaqāt of aṣl and how they determine the practice of historic preservation.

Locals and Preservation Policies

Around midnight one mild summer night, I was walking back home from Bab Touma. It was one of those summer nights in Syria I especially loved, the dry heat of the day had given way to a balmy breeze, when the empty alleys in the quarters and neighborhoods of the Old City were alive with people of all ages walking, sitting, and standing. In the summer life was relocated from inside the bayt ʻarabī to the alleys in many parts of the Old City. As I neared my cul-de-sac, I heard drilling and chiseling in one of the neighbor's house. I smiled, for I knew what it meant; but it was a group of women walking towards me that vocalized my thoughts. One of them remarked the noise was someone fixing up their house and if it was taking place at this hour than it must be in violation of government regulations. Another retorted I fixed up my whole house in broad daylight and no one said anything.

Such incidents of someone renovating their house in the middle of the night occurred on a rather frequent scale in the Old City among locals who just did not want to go through the bureaucracy of getting a permit to improve their house. Moreover, the preservation guidelines did not allow for many of the changes people wanted to make to their houses. Most were not concerned with returning their houses to the aṣl, they wanted

to move forward and add layers of new material and modern comfort. Naturally whether they were shwām or not they felt the resentment of having to be told how to preserve their homes especially when the government did not offer financial assistance or incentives. Although architects from the government could offer suggestion many locals dismissed them as too theoretical and not practical. If Nadeem talked about feelings to a local, his ideas would most likely be ridiculed.

This brought another issue to the forefront when discussing the preservation in the Old City; lack of methodology. Only recently had the University of Damascus with an institute in Italy begun a program for historic preservation. This university had been sending its architect and fine arts students to the Old City for several decades to study and document the built environment. It was a bright spring day when I opened the front door of the house I lived in and almost tripped over a group of students sitting on the threshold with sketching paper and pencils. The cul-de-sac was teeming with students. My neighbor told me students from engineering and fine arts colleges came here every year on assignment. Their sight had become so common in the spring that no one noticed them much. However, this sketching and documenting had not produced anything concrete. Furthermore, residents of the Old City felt they know their city and houses better than some university educated engineer. They lived in them and had to deal with peeling plaster, crumbling mud, decaying wood, and moldy stones. This was the feeling most locals had from the bayt ʻarabī.

Residents of the Old City wanted to make their homes comfortable and more adaptable to the seasons. They wanted them warm in winter and closed off corridors or

courtyards. In the summer they wanted to open new windows. Others wanted to add a room, fix a room, improve a kitchen, or bathroom. They believed that they should be able to go to the bathroom without going through the courtyard. They wanted to open doors between rooms so they could get from one room to another without having to go through the courtyard. Furthermore their sense of what was beautiful or their sense of aesthetic varied not only from one another but also from that of the cosmopolitans. They found plastic flowers and fake fountains better than the real ones and easier to upkeep.

Zayd was an intense young man that I met through a friend of a friend. He was working on restoring houses in the Old City and when he heard of my project, was excited to talk to me about his work. He had vast experience as a mason, but had no formal education either in construction or engineering. He loved to work on the restoration of old houses, churches, and mosques. He preferred the latter because according to him they were more "spiritual." Though he lacked a formal education, he was very knowledgeable about his work and he took me to several churches and mosques in the Old City that had been "renovated." In our tour he stressed how the actual work was based on an engineer's recommendations and had nothing to do with historical documents or preservation technique. He complained how because he had no formal education, his suggestions and recommendations went unheeded and did not carry the weight of someone with a degree.

He took me to the Church of Hanania that I discussed in Chapter Three. Until the early 1970s it was a damp, crumbling bayt ʻarabī with stairs leading to the basement where it was assumed existed the original house of Ananias. Since Damascus had been

destroyed and rebuilt several times during the past 2000 years it did not surprise anyone that the chapel was now underground. This was considered the aṣl of the structure and it was left in tact. The bayt ʿarabī on the other hand was demolished to construct a new modern building of stone and fortified cement. The engineer at the time felt this was the right thing to do and his name is forever enshrined on a plaque inside the courtyard of the new building on the wall near the gate: "Fuad Awad engineer architect 1973." Thirty odd years later such an act would be considered inappropriate. In those intervening years, a crumbling bayt ʿarabī has assumed importance as aṣl.

Zayd had also worked on private homes. Many of the locals expressed their lack of interest about heritage and history in their practice of renovating their houses as they saw fit. If a house continued to deteriorate than it would be lost to them, hence their immediate concern was in preserving their home from collapse. I was told of one family who in the process of renovations came across stairs and stone markings clearly archeological remains from a previous time period but they quickly covered up the findings before the government could get wind of it because that would mean forfeiting their home.

Zayd admitted to me what I had already surmised to be common practice, that there were ways around building restrictions such as working at night and of course bribing to officials. Government engineers who were supposed to be overseeing the buildings of the Old City in some cases could be "persuaded" to overlook certain things. Locals who were caught violating the historic preservation guidelines had to pay a fine

and/or demolish the illegally constructed structure. I had met residents who proudly explained how they had gotten around these restrictions either through bribes or building at night. But then the government itself did not always adhere to its own restrictions. One of the houses in the Old City near Bab Touma was being converted into a government school. It was with complete incredibility that I saw them using steel beams and fortified cement. Another interesting note is a policy to move schools from the Old City since they cause traffic jams in the already congested alleys. Furthermore, the vibrations from buses and other motor vehicles in the Old City shake the foundations of the buildings. This is one example where the government cannot enforce the same policy of historic preservation among the different agencies working in the Old City.

The building permits required for renovating houses were expensive and time consuming. The approval process was very bureaucratic. Zayd told me that a permit to renovate a room or fix a house entailed the same procedure. One person I knew had to bribe officials just to move his application through the bureaucratic process. The use of old material increased the price. But then cement was not readily available either. A permit was needed in order to buy cement and many resorted to the black market for their building material needs. In the past there was a process that I had heard from several sources that if a government official purchased some property in the Old City and wanted to do something on this property there would be an easing of building restrictions in the Old City for a month or so and people with the means would take advantage of this amnesty and fix up their homes accordingly. People preferred to use cement and iron as

it was considered modern and practical building material and usually did not adhere to government guidelines to use straw and mud.

Mustathmirīn and Preservation

In Haret Hanania a house was purchased by a mustathmir and converted into a restaurant called Casablanca. Malik the young owner saw his role as preserving history and heritage as well as offering services to tourists groups who came to tour the church of the neighborhood. Like Ali he saw his role as improving the neighborhood. He told me he allowed tour groups that came to the church to use the restrooms in his restaurant whether they ate there or not. Through historic preservation he was also involved in reverting the house he had purchased to its asl. He assured me that he had not changed the layout of the building that the physical structure remained as it was. However, he explained the interior decoration and design had changed significantly. He was very meticulous in the process to create an authentic heritage home/restaurant.

He showed me pictures he had taken of the house before and during the restoration and renovation process. He emphasized the derelict condition the house was in and how the people who had lived in it were unable to maintain it properly. Every year he informed me it cost him $10,000 to maintain and upkeep and this was just the décor and paint. He changed the décor because he had customers who had been coming to the restaurant for six and seven years and wanted to give them something new to look at. He added wooden panels with ancient Roman art to symbolize the different civilizations that had crossed Syria. In his search for different styles he sought what he

thought his customers could recognize and the eclectic style he employed was to attract the biggest number of customers. He wanted symmetry and paid attention to the smallest details. "I want beauty and comfort" and he shopped at antique stores to find what he wanted. Christopher Ross, the American envoy to the Middle East, signed his guest book and wrote "This is my home away from home." For Malik this was a confirmation that he had created a hospitable atmosphere in his restaurant.

I looked around the restaurant and my eye did not fall on an empty spot, it was a museum with the different artifacts on display. Malik explained the items he had on display in his restaurant were once found in all courtyard houses. Hence, he was recreating the "authentic" atmosphere found in a bayt ʿarabī. Those who came to his restaurant could imagine life in a courtyard house and the history contained in them: "All old homes are museums…People with no history have no roots. We need history. We are sitting in a house that has a history maybe in a spot where a woman gave birth." The bayt ʿarabī in his mind had already become an artifact and "ethnographic object" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998), though the ones next door to his restaurants were still inhabited. This is one example of how the different ṭabaqāt of discourses concerning the bayt ʿarabī and in turn the Old City exist side by side.

According to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett "While it looks old, heritage is actually something new. Heritage is a mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past" (1998:7). The past was embedded in the architectural form and implied not only nostalgic memories but a sense of shared history. Malik assumed that the artifacts

he had on display would have significance to his clients regardless if they were shwām or not. The bayt ʿarabī and the items supposedly found in one have become familiar to cosmopolitans regardless of their aṣl because they have developed an appreciation for the Old City and what it represents.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett noted that "Heritage not only gives buildings, precincts, and ways of life that are no longer viable for one reason or another a second life as exhibits of themselves. It also produces something new" (1996:150). What was happening with the bayt ʿarabī was a process of making them unviable for modern living in order for them to assume a more profitable existence as places of heritage. This was what Malik did by turning a house that had people living there into a museum/restaurant in the name of preserving heritage. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett discussed how objects of every day life became artifacts and heritage or "ethnographic objects" by which she means they become heritage artifacts instead the objects of every day life: "They did not begin their lives as ethnographic objects. They *became* ethnographic through the processes of detachment and contextualization" (1998:3; italics in the original). But the process of detachment did not only mean "the physical act of producing fragments but also to the detached attitude that makes that fragmentation and its appreciation possible" (18) which is what the discourse that the houses were no longer viable for modern living has hoped to accomplish.

In preserving the house, Malik wanted to keep to historic material but did use cement and iron beams to make the walls stronger. "For a restaurant mud and straw are

not stable, too much trembling" but there was nothing out of place, he assured me "it is all proper." Malik insisted on what he termed traditional material in is décor. "Nothing new no aluminum only wood and all in the old style…" When I asked about wood, he replied: "Wood has soul it gives warmth. Why does it give warmth? It is energy wood is energy. It keeps warmth among people."

Malik's restaurant is made all the more unique by its location in a historic neighborhood. The heritage of houses is improved by the location in the Old City. Malik had an advantage over other restaurants in the newer neighborhoods because he was marketing aṣāla and tradition along side his appetizers and entrees. As he said his clients sit in history and he made sure they could not escape by his collection of artifacts surrounding them.

Although in the past uninhabited homes had been converted into storehouses, shops, or workshops for light industry what was currently taking place with the change of function is their designation as heritage sites. They were also being removed from the realm of daily interactions of locals in the neighborhood. The houses converted into stores or workshop remained within the spatialized practices of residents. They either worked or shopped there. Restaurants that aim to market heritage do not belong to the neighborhood and locals. Malik's neighbors cannot afford to eat in a restaurant frequented by heads of states and diplomats but they can sit outside their stores and homes and watch the wealthy clients walk by.

Marwan, an architect working on the refurbishing of houses was not sure if opening restaurants preserved the Old City. "What are we going to preserve?" he asked "buildings, social networks, there are lots of deserted houses in ruins. Shwām don't live in these houses. Do people who come from Ḥaurān to live here in cheap rent, do they have the same responsibility?" He added: "Things are moving in a direction and I am not sure if it is positive or negative. I don't necessarily think it's a negative thing. It can be favorable in a place where nothing is happening socially and economically, so this is good."

Variations on Preservation

Not all cosmopolitans sought to recreate the authentic house in their investments in the Old City. For many of the mustathmirīn in the Old City the houses were important largely because of their location and not necessarily for what they offered in terms of aesthetic value. As a matter of fact since a large number of houses in the Old City had been divided and subdivided over the course of the years, finding a house with all its "original" elements intact was becoming more challenging. In this instance, the location superseded the historic vernacular architecture. Marwan worked on converting bayt ʿarabī into a restaurant in the Old City and had to convince his employer and owner of the restaurant that they should not recreate the historic motif decorations. The house was a simple affair, with a small courtyard and two stories. Each of the walls belonged to different eras and houses. The bayt ʿarabī lacked the historic ʾblāq and ʿajamī and hence it would have been a massive effort to recreate these decorations in the house. In addition

to being expensive it would had emulated almost every other restaurant in the Old City. Marwan was correct when he averred "If you have seen one restaurant you have seen them all" about the house/restaurants in the Old City. Hence, in what eventually became known as *Al-Dar* (the house) he managed to retain an original interior design to a house where each room had nothing in common with the other.[85] Since he could not change the structure according to the guidelines for the preservation of the Old City, he focused on design. His creativity was in how he reinterpreted the historical space and gave a new orientation for the courtyard, iwan, and hall. The courtyard floor was damaged and instead of recreating the original design he decided for something radically different and new, polished red marble for the floor and fountain.

Marwan's actions were considered sacrilegious by many old house admirers since, according to them, he had not respected the aṣl. He was aware of this when he says that "The bayt ʿarabī is a form, a terminology, an issue, and an ideology. However, the house itself did not lend itself to restoration. It was a simple family dwelling made of several connected homes. It had different style windows and doors indicating it never stood as a whole." His biggest challenge was to find new elements that would fit with the old house not only in terms of aesthetics but function as well. He used an old color scheme in a new way. According to his interpretation the old colors in a bayt ʿarabī were white, black, red, green from the trees, brown and blue. Walls were usually whitewashed

[85] Many of the names of restaurants are a variation of house and home. Other restaurants include La Maison Shāmī, Casablanca, Takaya (hostel), etc.

because of the material used. Bedrooms were usually pastel colors. In the restaurant he had three main colors, red the floor, dark blue walls, yellow lighting.

One of the owners did admit that he needed convincing not to recreate a bayt ʿarabī. But he insisted that they were preserving the house because they have used old material in a new way such as in the use of the stone. He also said that this created a distinction between Al-Dar and other restaurants. "People do not come for the food they come for the experience…it is totally a different house, only the black stone walls left of the original."

Problems with the Preservation Policy

I came across two main agencies overseeing the historic preservation of the Old City. In addition to the Committee for the Protection and Preservation of the Old City under the authority of the governor of Damascus, there was the Department of Ancient Damascus Antiquities under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture. I was never quite clear on the role of each and confused them. When I met Hani of the Department of Ancient Damascus Antiquities he told me that one was legislative and the other executive. Since the division of labor between the two agencies seemed in my opinion to overlap, I decided to interview Hani about what he thought the future of the Old City would be. He confirmed that the idea to preserve the Old City had been proposed for several years even decades but there had been no stipulations on how it should be done. He admitted the serious lack of preservation experts and hence one of the obstacles to the historic preservation of the Old City was the need for technical and planning expertise.

When I interviewed him in March 2004 he said "we are still at the beginning there are several obstacles to developing a plan for preservation because there are all these different concepts and plans, conservation versus preservation, prevention etc. It is difficult to apply these concepts within a comprehensive plan." However he also noted that the project to preserve Damascus is very much a local project that depends on local expertise. He stressed an important point in preservation that local experts are better in tune with the needs of the city especially a city like Damascus that has its own "spirituality." According to Hani this is "a big word and an internal feeling. The history of each neighborhood tells a story and each building was built for a purpose a door was opened for a reason and this needs a comprehensive and thorough study." He talked about the role historic material in this spirituality:

> Stone is an organic material, wood is a living matter a stone breathes, if you block its pores it dies. Mud and straw are organic material they were once living... These materials are from the soul of the human and lives with humans. You are dealing with a piece of wood or iron, wood deteriorates and does not cause any environmental damage. This is our relation with our history, the comfort we feel in the old neighborhoods, fountains makes the air milder. The jasmine vine, the citrus trees respect humans. Preservation of identity is important for future generations…if we lose our identity we lose everything.

Hani saw the built environment and the materials used to construct it as part of the identity of the shwām. Intertwined with the effort to preserve the unique urban fabric is

to preserve this feeling of place and belonging. Hani as a shāmī could speak of belonging in the Old City. However, as mentioned earlier, even non-Damascenes have this feeling. The Old City was no longer the property of shwām but to anyone who could be attuned to the feeling of the city. Furthermore, Hani also believed that the level of architectural ingenuity of the past surpassed what was available in the present and this legacy needed to be preserved.

But the preservation efforts are hampered by other efforts. As one official told me:

> What is sorely missing in Damascus and this has come up with numerous discussions with officials and concerned citizens, is a vision of what this preservation should lead to. As one person said in order to know how to preserve we must be able to know what the structure will be used for. Currently houses in the Old city are preserved for one of the following functions: restaurants and cafes, hotels, art galleries and studies, and residences.

Many of the locals and mustathmirīn found the preservation guidelines put forth by the government as not only restrictive when it comes to implementation but that there was no overall plan or vision for the preservation of the Old City. The guidelines were not for houses to be lived in but for artifacts do not take into account the social aspects. As a matter of fact they call for the detachment of the vernacular building not only from history but also from the social and cultural surroundings. The fact that the government itself was rather vague on the process added to the confusion. Nonetheless, whereas

locals rejected this aṣl and tradition and insisted in practice on making their houses compatible with modern life even if this means adding aluminum window frames and dividing rooms, mustathmirīn worked with the aṣl because it benefited their investments to have an added layer of history and tradition.

Many restaurant owners complained that the Committee for the Protection and Preservation of Old Damascus impeded rather than facilitated their work especially when it came to the interpretation of the guidelines. One owner told me how the committee closed them for a year and accused them of not renovating according to the guidelines and he turned to me and said "but there is no law on how to renovate!" The restaurant owner went on to explain how the guidelines were vague and general and therefore open to as many interpretations as there were people interpreting them. He also raised practical problems that clearly indicate how theoretical and highly inapplicable the guidelines could be. "When these houses were first built there were no cars but I have buses from the school next door and every time a bus passes the house shakes. I had to convince them that we need to use concrete in the building. There is wood in the kitchen that cannot be removed though it can pose a fire hazard." He told me that he added heating under the floor which was a not allowed because it did not exist during Ottoman times. He expressed what other owners and architects have faced in trying to work with the committee: "No law on how to rebuild, they don't know. They say to us you must use old material but no one will tell you what old material is!" He insisted he was not

opening a museum but a restaurant in old Damascus and wanted to be different. "Let's keep the good old and show new not cover it."

In the words of one architect the Committee for the Protection and Preservation of Old Damascus "is run by people who are not qualified enough nor have enough power to enforce things and there is some corruption." He went on to explain how there was neither direction nor clear vision of how the Old City should be preserved. He also alluded to the fact that there was no conservation experience and how most of the restoration work was done privately. He added "It also does not make sense not to change the function of a room built 100 years ago. People these days like their bathrooms, next to, if not in their bedrooms and they should be able to have this."

If the city is to remain alive it needs to modernize taking into account the requirements of the locals to lead a modern life. Services have to be upgraded and locals have to feel that they have a say in the future of their quarters and neighborhoods. However, as the Old City is becoming a traditional city it is attracting a new kind of inhabitants. The same architect I mentioned above made the point: "The laws have changed and now foreigners can buy houses in the Old City so what happens with these houses and how will they be used remains to be seen. There is a change in the pattern of who buys houses in Damascus and it could become like Venice where the Japanese and Americans only live there for two weeks a year."

Officials are aware of the discrepancy in the guidelines for historic preservation in the Old City. However, as one official told me the concern was more with:

> If we have a building in a city that is demolished but has a rich history what is better for it to be reconstructed or not? There are different ideas on this. As a society that is sympathetic to this history it is better to reconstruct this building because it is important and essential for the history of the country and it will help us understand the history. So there is a historical and cultural continuity. Others would say leave it as it is do not have this continuity with the past.

Places and Memory

How to preserve is not the only concern of officials and cosmopolitans but what to preserve is also important. Nadia Khost during our interview said that "buildings are one of the manifestations of civilization and the relationship with the environment. What is reflected in buildings is the level of taste, thought, and social relations that humans have reached." She saw the preservation of the Old City, as well as the extramural neighborhoods, as having a direct connection with historical memory. Nora wrote "there are *lieux de memoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de memoire*, real environments of memory" (Nora 1989:7). This had come about because "If we were able to live within memory, we would not have needed to consecrate *lieux de memoire* in its name. Each gesture, down to the most everyday, would be experienced as ritual repetition of a timeless practice in a primordial identification of act and meaning" (8).

For Khost the Old City is a living environment of memory because of the built environment. It is the place of history and memory, the two are indistinguishable. The

urban fabric of the Old City with its bayt ʻarabī and social network still described an environment where memory resided because daily practices made this possible as we have seen in Chapter Three. However, it should be noted that these very acts are considered to be unmodern by many cosmopolitan and not contributing to the history and future of the Old City. Memory becomes caught between the ummodern and tradition. In the current historic preservation projects that aim to recreate a sanitized space many of these practices have no role.

Thus it is not just the spaces and places that need to be preserved for the memories to survive but the spatial practices of people. Khost also talked about the need for the people who lived in these spaces and remembered certain events to remain in their surroundings. Memories are not only embedded in places but in the people who live in these places. She believed that the Old City should not be depopulated in the process of preservation because the historic neighborhoods are as much about the people as they are about the houses and the alleys.

However, history in Arab countries including Syria had never been an organized effort that could erase the social memory Nora believes no longer exists. History in Syria had not organized and ordered the past. Perhaps Said described it best when he wrote:

> All the Arab countries I know do not have proper state archives, public record offices, or official libraries anymore than they have decent control over their monuments, antiques, the history of their cities, individual works of architectural art like mosques, palaces, schools. This realization does not give rise to anything like the moralistic feeling provoked by

> Shelley's witness to Ozymandia's ruin, but a sense of a sprawling, teeming history off the page, out of sight and hearing, beyond reach, largely irrecoverable…our history is written mostly by foreigners, visiting scholars, and intelligence agents, while we do the living relying on personal and disorganized collective memory, gossip almost, plus the embrace of a family or knowable community to carry us forward in time." (Said 2001:232)

Said was writing about how history had not taken hold of people's lives in the Arab world which includes Syria where people for the most part are still in the realm of Nora's memory. The destruction of the Old City would not only lead to this collective memory lapse, preservation as well could be destructive. Khost stated that "the issue is not destruction but how to preserve" so that the city did not become in her words New York. She was against those who thought being modern implied mimicking the west. The greatest threat was those people whom she calls *ṭabaqah tayrah* (fleeting layer/class) that had no identity or national roots and saw all the west as New York. Here she was expressing her concern with those who had no memory and substituted history with a western history. Their actions were changing the cityscape of Damascus. They were building modern structures like skyscrapers and shopping malls and she feared they would eventually invade the Old City. Ironically, this is not a new debate in the Arab world. Since the late 1800s the discourse had been how much to become like the west and how much should distinctive traditions be maintained. Here it was playing again on

the cityscape of Damascus both old and new. One official in the committee for the protection of Damascus voiced a similar concern when he talked about *ghazuū thaqafī* (cultural invasion) which occurred when:

> standards are lost. Currently [Syrians] lives under standards of lack, lack of technology and education. There is external control of these elements in which imperialism decides what kinds of standards it will give and to what end. They sometimes give inappropriate standards for a region. We have to be aware of this. In Damascus the archeological remains are a reference. There is an official decree to protect these areas and to document them. Legal protect of historic sites is very important.

What was problematic with this view is that the Old City is seen as ruins, remains of previous civilization. This contradicts sharply with the reality of the life found in the quarters and alleys. Since preservation could only apply to the no longer viable, the preservation of the Old City has faced serious contradictions. Ironically, the life and people of the Old City were not seen as sites of memories or the aṣl since they were not considered as the real owners of the city. They closed off their courtyards and sealed doors and modified their houses so that the bayt ʻarabī was no longer recognizable.

Khost concurred that "the problem with the Old City it is too alive" and this was what was creating problems with the historic preservation projects that are taking place in thriving urban centers. Boyer (994) was concerned with how historic preservation projects transfer certain forms from the past, taking them out of context and imposing

them on the present. It was the reverse of history where the present was imposed on the past. She argued that forms could not be transferred from one age to another without adjusting the parameters of "representability" or taking into account the changes in the social, political, and historical field of vision (Boyer 1994). The process only privileges one point of view of that history which again points to the silences in the historical narrative (Trouillot 1995).

In the Old City the issue remained how to preserve its spirituality or feeling. For the government and mustathmirīn this was in the physicality of the Old City in the buildings and for some the organic building materials. Yet for many of the locals the spirituality of the Old City resided in the social relations and not the structures. However, it is hard to market and invest in social relations.

Conclusion

For over three decades the intramural Old City has been under legal protection to preserve its unique architecture and urban fabric. Since the 1940s there have been appeals to preserve the historic districts of Damascus. How to do this had never been established and there are as many different ways of preserving the Old City as people involved in the process. What was missing in many of these assessments and points of view was that the Old City was not a historical artifact that had been deserted and was currently being re-discovered to be saved from annihilation but that for its entire history Damascus has been continuously inhabited. This fact could be quickly established by anyone who walks through the alleys of the Old City. For these people who live there

and want to make their homes comfortable within their means they were in direct opposition with the preservation efforts.

Whereas the mustathmirīn argue that the Old City should maintain its unique vernacular architecture because this is history, on which their investments are contingent, they ask to be allowed more liberty in interpreting them since they are attuned to the aṣl and heritage of the house. Locals, on the other hand, think the guidelines prohibit them from living in comfortable and modern houses. For many locals their homes in the Old City were not historic artifacts or ethnographic objects that should be treated as a museum. Therefore, the current residents and inhabitants of the Old City in many ways were seen not only as impediment to the historical preservation of the City but contributing to its decline. This also highlighted that many of the houses in which people live lacked the historic artwork and decorations that rendered these houses of no cultural or historic value.

The guidelines also stress that these additions of the mid-20th century are considered inferior and of no aesthetic or historical quality. They should be removed and the house should revert to its original as mapped in the cadastral. Of course today with even more modern conveniences people did not want to live in turn of the century houses and they found ways around it either by working in the dead of the night or bribing government officials that inspect houses. As a matter of fact it became a struggle between people and the government. To locals their homes were not historic artifacts but where they resided. Hence, the challenges of living in a city with a history as old as time.

How did you preserve such a place? This is what Syrian officials are still trying to answer.

Chapter Seven: Damascus Still Seven Layers

In this dissertation I have illustrated how heritage is both constraining and enabling in the construction of modernities by the different social actors. Through the different practices of the social actors in the Old City different articulations of modernity are being expressed. The different interpretations of modernity by cosmopolitans and locals are in constant negotiation with one another. Cosmopolitans define modernity in terms of heritage whereas locals illustrate how community persists, despite "ruptures," because of spatial practices that provide continuity to the inhabitants of the Old City. The Old City provides an excellent example of alternate forms of modernity that are usually overlooked in historical sites. It is also a site of transformation where the local and the global converge.

Certain neighborhoods in the Old City are undergoing dramatic transformation as they shift from the local residential ḥārah to a cosmopolitan gentrified area with an emphasis on tourism. This is best illustrated by the fast rate shops in neighborhoods are being converted from groceries and workshops that serve the local population to souvenir stores for tourists. Shops for "oriental" wares are taking the place of groceries, butchers, bakeries, etc as the prospect of an open economy might encourage tourism. These shops sell the same kind of souvenir merchandise, carpets, beads, shawls, and other tourist commodities that are mainly made in India or China.

The changes are occurring locally but are attuned to global flows, especially towards foreign investment. Therefore hotels, restaurants, and other tourist

establishments need to be built in order to be ready for the influx when and if it comes. Locating this infrastructure in the Old City capitalizes on the unique built environment and the history of the neighborhoods. I remember Nadeem commenting how he thought it was interesting that people who lived in Damascus outside the walls, dressed to come to the cafes and restaurants of the Old City as though they were taking a trip somewhere. The impact of this process will become apparent in the years ahead especially in whether or not the novelty of the Old City is sustainable among consumers.

Although my research is situated in the context of global cultural capital flows I am concerned with the continuity between colonization and globalization, rather than rupture. Much of what is happening in Damascus is not new, but the process is more intensified than prior eras. I have argued that the transformations in the Old City of Damascus currently taking place reflect transformations that occurred during the Ottoman and colonial period. History and memory take on different meanings for different people depending on the social and political context. The cityscape and its history are viewed in terms of ṭabaqāt. Any understanding of the current situation in Damascus would be incomplete without historical contextualization. Contemporary globalization, in turn, has to be understood within this context.

Regionally and historically, Damascus has always been important whether in the on again off again Middle East peace process between the Arab states and Israel or in its current alliance with Iran. The relationship between Iran and Syria is fascinating on several levels but it is how this relationship translated onto the cityscape. Iran is the only

country that has its own terminal at Damascus International Airport for weekly charter flights from Iran that come packed with religious pilgrims. The Iran pilgrims are a ubiquitous presence in Damascus and especially the Old City. The women are wrapped in their black chadors and the men have somber suits and trimmed beards. Increasingly Persian is heard in the Old City especially in the market area around Shiite shrines. The Iranian government has donated the funds for the rebuilding of some of the Shiite Shrines, in a unique and distinct Persian style that contrasts sharply with the built environment in the Old City. The growing presence of the Iranians in the Old City needs to be examined within the new geopolitical situation in the region.

What is sorely missing more so than in the past is a comprehensive plan and vision for the preservation of the Old City. Officials talk about not wanting to convert the Old City into an open air museum but they have no concrete strategy or vision on how to prevent this from happening. Long term residents who own homes patiently wait to see what will happen. For many of them, their sons and daughters do not want to live in the Old City. Unlike some of the cosmopolitans who are moving in, some of the locals want to move out. For one thing they do not live in luxurious houses and the one they do live in requires major maintenance. The money that can be used to fix a bayt ʿarabī can purchase a modern ṭābiq or several. This is directly the result of the increased interest in real estate in the Old Cities. For some locals this is an opportunity of selling their bayt ʿarabī at a profit and moving elsewhere. Others would hang on. Especially the old. Renters remain in a more precarious situation, especially with the new law that I will

discuss below. There are too many contradictions in government policy towards the Old City. For instance one policy states that schools should eventually be moved from the historic neighborhoods. Yet the government is building them in some of the smallest alleys therefore making it even more difficult for schools buses and vans to drop off and pick up children.

There is this sense of nonchalance among locals concerning change. I have heard often articulated in different ways that this plan is not new, or that this has happened in the past, and so when it comes to the transformations in the cityscape there is not much concern. I can describe this attitude as blasé or lack of concern. Locals believe that this interest in the Old City might wan if the past is any indication. They have seen plans and projects start, falter or for some reason end abruptly. The implementation of certain projects does not mean they will continue and more projects will follow. A governor might change and so will the policy. Now the emphasis is on investment and tourism but this, it is believed, will not always be the case. The only permanence in the Old City is the change.

The slow opening of Syrian economy to foreign investment is introducing new consumer habits and a new class of Syrians with new spending habits (Salamandra 2004). These latest habits are being exhibited in the Old City. The restaurants are new but not really, they cater to a specific clientele and market the heritage of the courtyard houses. For now women and men dressed in the latest fashions can come to Old City but the long term impact of the commingling of different classes and modes of consumption cannot be

predicted. It is likely that the Old City is attracting different people because of the new experience of restaurants and cafes in historic settings.

It remains to be seen if mustathmirīn can remain creative in providing new venues that people would want to visit. With the increase of restaurants that serve comparable food and provide a similar experience for diners competition might reduce the number. One of the jokes in the ḥārah on the number of restaurants there was "soon owners will be the only customers in their restaurants." As I was leaving Haret Hanania rumors were circulating that restaurant Casablanca was not what it used to be. There were some concerns on whether it could still attract top level officials including the president of Syria.

Though it is easy to see the Old City become an open food court the issue remains that these establishments cannot all sustain themselves in the Old City. There will be a point where saturation will be reached. Although restaurant owners believe that each restaurant caters to a certain clientele, the opening of new ones seems to leave old ones barely hanging on. Thus they have to reinvent themselves and this explains the change in ownership, management, and decorations of restaurants. The same holds true for hotels. How many can the old city sustain, still remains to be seen since hotels are relatively new in the Old City with the first one scheduled to open in Spring 2005.

In addition, there is a steady steam of foreign capital coming into the country as new private non-Syrian banks are opening. It remains what kinds of investments would appeal to foreign investors especially since the sanctions imposed by the US in 2004 as part of the Syrian accountability act are still in place. There is also UN Council

resolution 1559 on Syria's role in the assassination of Lebanese Prime minister in 2005 that make Syria a risky environment for investment in an increasingly volatile region of the world. The international scene impacts both directly and indirectly the future of changes in the Old City. Moreover, the influx of foreign investors might lead to different relations with long-term residents. Mustathmirīn who were mainly Syrians were able to maintain the social relations and become, to a certain degree, part of the scenery in the ḥārah. They mixed and commingled with people and tried to retain good relations. The question remains if non-Syrian investors would feel the same obligation.

The Old City is still in the process of change and the future ramifications of gentrification and tourism might have decidedly different affects on the city. Many locals believe that if the city has survived invasion and decimation over the course of the centuries what is happening today is merely a footnote to the history of the Old City. On the other hand, cosmopolitans predict that the Old City might become "an open museum" with hotels, restaurants, art galleries and tourist sites, a playground for tourists. Some officials are working against converting the Old City into a museum. While the locals and the cosmopolitans have their own interpretation of what the changes in the Old City might ultimately lead to, currently new legislation that might tilt the balance in favor of one or the other.

Between Landlords and Rent Laws

I have mentioned earlier that in early 2004 a law that had been debated for several years was finally coming into effect. It was an update of the rent law first implemented

in 1952. The update was issued in 2001 but it took several years for its implementation (Al-Istadh).[86] After decades of rent control a new relationship was being enacted between tenants and property owners. Until two years ago, many landlords would rather have their property uninhabited than deal with tenants. As someone described the situation "to rent is to give up your property." Landlords saw the value of their property plummet as renters paid the same rent decades later not taking into account inflation or currency value. There was no legal recourse to evict tenants or to increase rent. For many property owners, they stopped maintaining their buildings because the rent was so low. Tenants refused to care for their homes because they believed it was the role of the landlord to do so. Residential buildings all over Syria were in disrepair as a result of this predicament.

Though the law had gone into effect all over the country I was curious about the impact on the Old City. There were mixed feelings about it among the residents of Haret Hanania based on who owned property and who was leasing. One of my informants said that since the law had seen earlier incarnations none that had actually been put into affect, many were skeptical if this one would actually be implemented. However, the current situation is different as Syria is trying to attract foreign investment and the laws had to be updated.

I was interviewing Salim in one of his properties when he told me about the law and how he could not wait for it to come into effect. He pointed to tenants of his and

[86] This information is from a photocopy I obtained from a stall near the government office. It is the stall that sells legislation or photocopies as they appear in newspapers and other official publications. Although the photocopy is apparently from a newspaper there is no date or name of the publication.

said: “Now I can get them out.” I asked why. He replied: “Look at them see how they live, they only live like this so that they can get money. I offered each one of them a ṭābiq. They refused thinking they can get more. Now let’s see what they get.”

Salim was referring to a practice where if landlords wanted to regain their property from tenants before the law was enacted, they would offer them monetary incentives and sometimes a new home elsewhere to persuade them to leave. Many tenants would wait for such an opportunity to present itself. Some would have actually purchased a ṭābiq or house elsewhere but remain in the leased rooms in order to get this form of compensation.

The new law made things work differently. Tenants can either pay the rent increase based on the current market value for the property, or the landlords can pay them a portion of the real estate value and have them move out. The law was to change the relationship between tenants and owners in that both should be treated fairly. Many property owners took this opportunity to evict tenants and sell their houses. A bayt ʿarabī that is not inhabited fetches a higher price than one that is. Thus landlords are able to easily sell their houses and for more profit.

Nahla who lived in a bayt ʿarabī first leased by her in-laws was worried about the increase in rent and she mentioned rumors of a thousand-fold increase. Her in-laws rented the house 30 years ago and she was paying the same rent though they no longer lived there. This is an example where tenants pass down the house to their descendents and they can do this legally.

My landlady's neighbors of thirty years were leaving. As part of the new rent laws they have chosen to accept compensation rather than pay extra rent. I thought my landlady would be upset with this law that has compelled her neighbors to move out but this was not the case. She said, "It's a shame that they have lived in the house for 30 years and only paid 100 SP (US$ 2) in rent. They have a house in Jaramanah (suburb of Damascus). Do you think it is fair for the owners?" She was sad to see them go but she did not feel they were evicted or they left unfairly. Her sympathy laid with her other neighbors, the landlords. The landlord had to pay them to leave and my landlady thought that was compensation enough especially since they had another house which they owned.

Until I left Haret Hanania at the end of 2004, I saw several families move but none that I knew. No one I did know in the ḥārah seemed particularly upset to see neighbors they have known for decades leave. If they left they got compensation, if they stayed they paid higher rent. No one seemed to think the Old City was actually being depopulated, though you would hear jokes that soon all the neighborhoods will be restaurants. They joke about it perhaps to mask a fear of the unknown but I think they joked because they did not feel it would actually happen. Thus the process of transformation in the Old City of Damascus seems to be less accompanied by a sense of loss.

Significance of Project

My dissertation is among the first to deal with the implementation and impact of historic preservation on people who live in areas undergoing conservation. Through ethnography I have shown the many actors involved in the designation of a heritage site and the implementation of historic preservation project. Most of all, I have focused on the people who actually live in these sites and how they negotiate the many interpretations of heritage and history as they go about their daily lives. As Herzfeld states: "Ethnography can empower voices not usually heard in discussions of tradition, historic conservation, and the like, the voices of those who live in the spaces as monuments by the state" (Herzfeld 1991:13).

The historic city has come to forefront of many studies on urban cities in both Africa and the Middle East. It is physically separated from modern neighborhoods by walls but it is also isolated conceptually as historic and backward. In these countries the walled city is simultaneously considered by locals as denigrate; the location of backwardness and ignorance. Hence, historic cities are the subject of "'urban retrieval'; not the wholesale removal of the old or the passive protection the historic fabric, but the revitalisation of old quarters so that they are given a role in the modern life of both the individual and the community" (Lawless 1980:183). This process is also part of the attempts to modernize the historic city and make it compatible with newer, "westernized" sections of the city so that the contrast is not as severe. Yet, the distinction is both artificial and manufactured as I demonstrated in Chapter Two.

To this date most work on the historic sections of cities in the Middle East and North Africa has been confined to debates on what constitutes and distinguishes an "Islamic" or "Arab" city from other urban centers (Abu Lughod 1987; Shami 1996). This emphasize on "Islamic" city is part of a growing body of literature that sees it as a colonial enterprise (Alsayyad 1992) not different from the distinction between historic and modern cities (Hamadeh 1992; Rabinow 1989; Wright 1991). In the edited volume on historic cities in North Africa Slymovics and Miller (2001) argue that studies should go beyond form and explore the function of this space (Slymovics and Miller 2001). Their edited volume explores new and unconventional ways of understanding this localized urban form. However, there is not much work on the residents who live in these areas and how they respond to attempts to historicize and revitalize their communities, nor how they live there. In contrast to these approaches, I have addressed these deficiencies and how inhabitants of the Old City seek their own form of modernity. I have also illustrated the ways in which locals and residents interact with globalization on a different scale than that of cosmopolitans and mustathmirīn.

What is currently considered the historic city in Damascus is largely the product of the late 1800s, the Ottoman era. Few but important physical remains from the Roman and other eras are also an essential part of the cityscape. Therefore Damascus is unique among other Ottoman cities in the Middle East such as Istanbul, Cairo, and Beirut that underwent massive modernization in the early 1900s thereby erasing large if not all of their historic centers. Damascus remains the best preserved. Although Damascus also witnessed its first attempts at modernization during the Ottomans many of the historic

neighborhoods remained intact and have survived to the 21st Century. It is this remaining built environment that is the focus of the preservation projects which in some cases is in direct conflict with the needs of residents. I have demonstrated that in order for the preservation projects to continue the historic city has to be in crisis and needs to be saved. It needs to be saved from destruction, from modern urban planning, that seeks to demolish old houses and build concrete multistory apartments. Furthermore it needs to be saved from its own residents who by the mere fact they live and work there are contributing to its decline both by the wear and tear they inflict on the fragile infrastructure and by being unable to appreciate its heritage.

I have argued the historic city is perceived simultaneously as backward and traditional and these two perceptions at times are complimentary-at times opposed-but both lead to the same result of preservation. Since it is deemed "backward" Damascus has to be modernized so that it as a whole can take its place among global cities. Modernization is taking the form of "preservation-based development" (Reichl 1999:4) aimed at tourists instead of urban renewal programs targeting local residents. The historic city as traditional becomes a heritage site and a repository of identity and history and therefore needs to be preserved for future generations and for the world since its part of the human civilization. Traditional in its positive manifestation applies to the built environment but the lifestyle and social practices that are seen as incompatible with the representation of heritage site are considered unmodern and have to be addressed. Ironically as buildings are being preserved some of the social practices are being lost.

In my dissertation I have aimed to push the study of urban anthropology in the Middle East beyond cities in crises and what constitutes and distinguishes an "Islamic City" from other urban settings. This research will be of significance to work being conducted on non-Western urban settings. Furthermore, this research will contribute to the expansion of the areas of theorizing in the anthropology of Middle East modernity and modernization, memory space and identity formation.

Anthropology of Syria

I have also conducted my research in a new region Syria that does not have a history of ethnographic research. There are several explanations to lack of interest in Syria among anthropologists. Certain regions of the Middle East, such as Egypt and Morocco, attained "prestige" where researchers and their students return generation after generation (Abu Lughod 1989). Syria has not attracted ethnographers as these places have. Yet there are a number of dissertations that have come out in the past several years that indicate, though difficult, it is not entirely impossible to conduct ethnographic research in Syria (Dorre 2004; Salamandra 2001; Shannon 2001; Zenlund 1994).

Although there is an increased number of anthropologists currently working in and on Syria, there is a limited number of published ethnographies in English. The published record includes (Chatty 1986) who wrote about the transformations a pastoral community in the northeastern part of the country underwent as it adjusted to settled life. Although initially Andrea Rugh intended to finish another book away from the distractions of Damascus when she rented a room in a village an hour away, the

experience there led her to write *In the Circle* a description of child rearing methods and domestic life among Syrians (Rugh 1997).

Nancy Lindisfarne wrote her fieldwork notes in the form of short stories collected in a volume entitled *Dancing in Damascus* (Lindisfarne 2000). Though the stories may not be considered of high literary merit, their ethnographic detail is wonderful. She initially conducted fieldwork on marriage practices among the elite but her stories include characters from different classes and backgrounds. She touches on the political oppression in Syria, sexual inequalities, as well as, marriage arrangements among the rich. By resorting to fiction Lindisfarne wanted to overcome the dilemma of dealing with informants in her text, the constraints of ethnography, and to reach a wider audience. She explains how she decided to write her field notes as short stories in the postscript, which lends her collection of fiction an ethnographic context where she situates herself in the field and text.

More recently there is the work by (Salamandra 2004). In this embryonic tradition I seek to contribute to the scholarship on Syria since it provides a fascinating case study for the challenges of modernity, modernization, globalization and national identity.

It is only appropriate to end my dissertation with Nizar Qabbani, the shāmī poet who in many of his poems recreated a Damascus that many still see and believe in. In one section he sums up what the city is:

Damascus

Is not a picture of paradise

It is paradise

Nor is it a copy of poem

It is the poem

Nor an Umayyad sword on the wall of Arabness

It is Arabness[87]

It is these images that help keep Damascus, especially the Old City, alive in the minds of all people whether they are Syrian or not.

[87] From "Damascus…Festival of Water and Jasmine" Qabbani (1995).

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Vita

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